SWORDS

SIDNEY HOWARD

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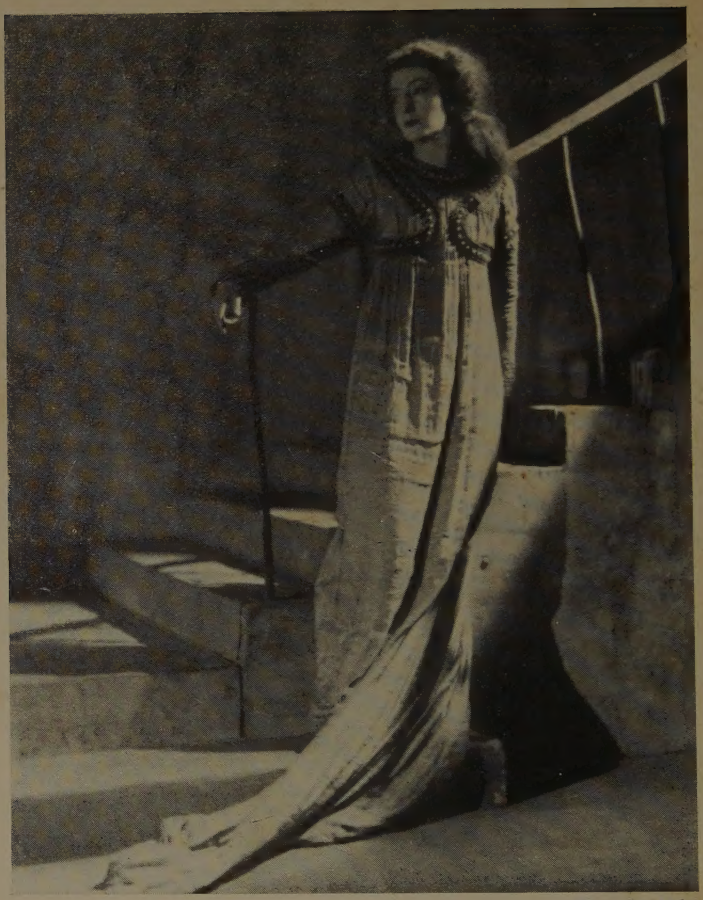

Photo by Abbé

FIAMMA

Clare Eames

SWORDS

BY

SIDNEY HOWARD

NEW YORK
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TO

CLARE EAMES

The author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to certain modern masters of mediæval life for the inspiration and instruction their books have afforded him. Particularly he would name Henry Osborn Taylor's "The Mediæval Mind", Henry Adams' "Mont St. Michel and Chartres", and the two revivers of mediæval romance, James Branch Cabell and Joseph Bedier.

CAST OF FIRST PRESENTATION

The Play was first produced at the opening of the National Theatre in New York City on September 1st, 1921.

The Principals

AMINA ..... *Sophie Wilds*
GIOVANNA ..... *Lillian Dix*
MADDELENA ..... *Helen Forrest*
CANETTO ..... *Jose Ruben*
JACOPONE ..... *John Saunders*
THE CAPTAIN OF THE GARRISON ..... *Edward Mackay*
UGOLINO ..... *Charles Waldron*
THE PAPAL NUNCIO ..... *Montague Rutherfurd*
MARIA ..... *Jane Darwell*
FIAMMA ..... *Clare Eames*
FIORENZO ..... *Catherine Roberts*
DAMIANO ..... *Raymond Bloomer*

Other Characters

A BURGHER ..... *Neil Quinlan*
A FISHERMAN ..... *Fairfax Burgher*
A FARMER ..... *William Ludlow*
A MOTHER ..... *Ida Zeithin*
HER CHILD ..... *Margaret Campbell*
A YOUNG MOTHER ..... *Winifred Taylor*
A FISHER'S WIFE ..... *Melita Milton*

SOLDIERS, MUSICIANS, PEASANTS AND OTHERS

The production was designed by Robert Edmund Jones.

The incidental music, including the settings of Adam de St. Victor's hymn and the thirteenth century song which Canetto sings, was composed by Donald N. Tweady.

The production was made under the management of Brock Pemberton.

Shortly after the opening Charles Waldron was replaced in the role of Ugolino by Arthur Vinton.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Fiamma
Ugolino
Damiano
Canetto
Fiorenzo
The Nuncio of the Pope
The Captain of the Garrison
The soldier, Jacopone
Maria
Amina
Maddelena
Giovanna
Soldiers, Burghers, Fisherfolk
A musician
Six singers

PERIOD

During the struggle between the Popes and the Emperors, a little after the height of the Crusades, a little before the revival of learning. The great days of the Guelphs and Ghibellines.

NOTE

The action of the play is continuous.

FIAMMA is marvellously like the mediæval concept of the Virgin Mary, the concept which inspired the cathedral of Chartres, the hymns of Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Paradiso of Dante. The concept of an altogether human Empress, devoted to her servants, none too scrupulous, temperamental, exacting, very feminine, wholly glorious.

The first act closes at Vespers. The second act at the height of the moon. The third act after moon-set. The fourth at dawn.

Colorfully the acts might be described as dusk, moonlight, torchlight, and daybreak.

From time to time a sentry passes the window.

THE SETTING

All the length of the Italian seacoast watch towers rise from the waters and perils of the middle ages. These days they are but gaunt things, futile ruins, lichen stained angles and broken parapets. We can only guess at the vitality of their past.

The action of this play occurs in one of them, the tower castle of Ugolino, a baron of the Ghibelline faction. It stands upon an isolated rock, a short row from the shore, a day's ride from Rome.

It is a high, shadowy, box of a place, of rough masonry and crude timber work. A stair at the back wall (as we look in) gives the single note of architectural symmetry. One arm reaches up to the door of a room. The other arm ends in a kind of gallery beneath a window which overlooks the sea. There is a fireplace, too, and, just opposite, a lower door. This is the single entrance from the outer world.

The upper room to which the stairway leads is the prison of FIAMMA. In her honor the master of the tower has to some extent softened its bleakness. On the stair wall, just outside FIAMMA'S door, he has made a shrine of the Virgin and Child, very bright and blue and gold. Below the stair-rail he has hung a crude tapestry of the Virgin in a mandorla of glory. Beyond this the place is crudely furnished. A bare table, one chair, some stools. Weapons stand in the corners and a fisher's net has been hung up to dry.

Under the floor there are dungeons. A trap leads to them.

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIAMMA (Clare Eames) . . . . . *Frontispiece*
Photo by James E. Abbé

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"BEAUTY WITH ME OR CORNHUSKS WITH A SWINE"
(Clare Eames and José Ruben) 112
Photo by James E. Abbé

SWORDS

SWORDS

THE FIRST ACT

Before the rise of the curtain, CANETTO *is heard singing very merrily.*

CANETTO

"Le vin est bon et bel et blanc.
Fort et fer et fin et franc,
Freit et fres et fourmijant!"

The rise of the curtain discovers the scene at twilight. (*A soldier stands at the window looking out over the sea. He comes down the stair. He pauses a moment. He looks up at the door of* FIAMMA'S *chamber.*) CANETTO *stands in the window. He is a smallish, alert man, dark, pale Italian. Sometimes he will seem very young to us, sometimes old and hardened. He is strangely clad in a kind of faded motley, worn, perhaps, by hard riding and rough beds. His cloak trails down below his feet.*

He is watching those on the stage below him.

(*Three servants enter.*)

They are three peasants. AMINA, *a waiting woman, is vulgar, gaudy and noisy. She is strewing the floor with rushes.* MADDELENA, *a charwoman, sweeps. The third,* GIOVANNA, *scrubs the table.*

THE SOLDIER

Mind you, no talk with Fiamma. . . .
Ugoline won't allow it.

[*He goes.*

AMINA

There's that singing again!
. . . So clean it up, he said.

MADDELENA

Who, the old Captain?
Well, we're cleaning.
He's a good soul.

GIOVANNA

It needs a cleaning, too. . . .
The filthy, stinkin' pig-sty.

[CANETTO *comes to the stair rail and listens to them. He is mightily amused by their talk.*]

AMINA

We're to have all we can eat and drink tonight.
There'll be a boar . . . a wild boar roasted.
We've not had that since Easter.

MADDELENA

Fish, always fish. . . .
That's what we get
Even on feast nights.

GIOVANNA

Feasting and fighting!
One day you dig a grave to bury your man,
The next you cook a feast to feed his Captain.

AMINA

Don't you know we're at war?

GIOVANNA

I don't know any good of it.

AMINA

You stupid peasant!

MADDELENA

Can't you leave her alone?
She's lost her man.

AMINA

Is that my fault?

[*She turns to* GIOVANNA

What are you complaining about?
We belong to Ugolino, don't we?
And your man did, too, before the wars killed him?
And Ugolino's Ghibelline, isn't he?
And doesn't that mean that he must fight
For the German Emperor against the Pope?

GIOVANNA

It's sin to fight against the Pope!

AMINA

But that's the way of wars
Between us Ghibellines and those swine, the Guelfs.
The Pope would drive the Emperor out of Italy;
The Emperor would shut the Pope up in a box.
There isn't room in Italy for both.

MADDELENA

That's plain enough.

AMINA

And now the master,
Who has been fighting, will be coming home,
And wants a feast to drink the Emperor's health,
And damn the Pope.

MADDELENA

Is it true Canetto brought word from the master?

AMINA

You haven't seen Canetto?

[CANETTO *is vastly pleased.*

GIOVANNA

Who is this Canetto?

AMINA

He's the master's lieutenant.

MADDELENA

And his councillor, too.
There must be something in the wind
If he comes here.
He's never come before——
Not in my day.

AMINA

Nor in mine.
I've only heard of him.
They say he's very fine and very clever,
But cruel . . . cruel.

[CANETTO *bows.*

MADDELENA

Yes.

GIOVANNA

Then what's he doing here?
More tricks to pester her?

AMINA

I shouldn't mind.
She's proud enough.
She wants a taking down.

MADDELENA

Maybe the master brings him here
To help him woo his hostage,
If he's so clever.

[*Each one, in turn, looks up toward the door of* FIAMMA'S *chamber.*]

GIOVANNA

She is so good, Madonna Fiamma.
She cured my son of the fever,
Simply by praying.

AMINA

I don't believe *she* cured him.

GIOVANNA

And there's Amelia's son,
A cripple since he was born,
Begging on the steps of the church.
She prayed for him . . .
He walks again.
You can't deny that's true.

AMINA

Prrrt!

MADDELENA

Well, there's my starving cousin Beppe, too.
He never caught enough fish
To feed his family.
She blessed his boat for him, and now
He's rich with fishing.

CANETTO

[*Bored with this, resumes his song from where he stands. The women see him for the first time.*]

Le vin est bel et bon et blanc. . . .
Fort et fer et fin et franc,
Freit et fres et fourmijant.

AMINA

Oh, God save us!

MADDELENA

A player!

GIOVANNA

It's a jester
Come to amuse Madonna Fiamma

CANETTO

Wrong, gentlewomen, it's a little dog
Sniffing for hidden bones.

MADDELENA

It *is* a jester!

AMINA

Sit up and speak!

MADDELENA

Play dead!

AMINA

[*Throwing a rush at him.*

Carry and fetch!

CANETTO

Hmmmmmm. . . .
Sweet . . . wondrous sweet!

How marvelous
These common rushes of the fields should hide
Such exquisite aroma!
It's lilac, violet, and spikenard
And makes an April garden.
You smell the flowers
On the salty air of the sea!

AMINA

I shall have roses in my hair tonight,
I shall drink wine and have fine food to eat,
And I shall have my lover to myself.

CANETTO

[*Chasing her.*

Scatter your rushes thick, I'll dance upon 'em;
Scatter your rushes, I will be your love!

[*Catches her.*

There's a feast tonight?

MADDELENA

The master's coming home.

GIOVANNA

For what my lady cares
He needn't come at all;
These rushes on the floor
Will be *his* bed!

CANETTO

Oh, gossip with me! How I love to hear
What ladies leave their husbands in the cold!

AMINA

The master's *not* her husband.

CANETTO

She's your lord's mistress?

AMINA

Not even that—
His prisoner.

CANETTO

Alas . . . poor lady!
And her husband too?

AMINA

Not he!
He's safe away from here!

MADDELENA

Her husband is the master's enemy.

AMINA

We're Ghibelline, we're for the Emperor, always.
He's Guelf. They say
That he's the Pope's best captain.

CANETTO

His name?

AMINA

Damiano.

CANETTO

Oh, I remember him. I saw him once.
[*A very brief pause.*
What is her name?

AMINA

Fiamma.

CANETTO

[*Like an echo.*
Fiamma!

AMINA

The people hereabouts
All think her holy and beautiful.
I call her proud, I do.

GIOVANNA

She is so good.
And she has such fine jewels.

AMINA

As for her jewels, Ugolino gives 'em to her.

MADDELENA

Yes—that's her kind.
She may have jewels—— But—you know!

GIOVANNA

She is so good.

AMINA

So good she can't abide the master.
To me the wonder is he'll trouble with her.

CANETTO

[*He speaks to himself, as from the most intimate depths of his memory.*]
I saw her once in Rome, between the glare
And darkness of a torch.
She is an ageless creature
Of vivid moods and colors.
It's plain enough throats have been cut for her.

[AMINA *shrugs her shoulders and moves away.*

Which of you is her waiting woman?

MADDELENA

None of us.
Maria waits on her.

CANETTO

Maria? Where is she?

AMINA

She will be going to the village
Upon Madonna's errands.

[JACOPONE *enters, staggering under the weight of two tremendous logs. He puts them on the fire, and kneels before the hearth to blow the blaze up.*]

GIOVANNA

Hi, woodman. . . .

JACOPONE

Hold your noise.

GIOVANNA

What's to do, Jacopone?

AMINA

We've made the room clean
As a wedding bed. . . .

MADDELENA

[*Laughing coarsely.*

As my lady's bed,
There's nothing cleaner.

AMINA

Has the master come yet?

JACOPONE

Not yet, he hasn't,
Near vespers, too.

CANETTO

[JACOPONE *has not observed him.*

Are you the guard?

JACOPONE

How did you get in?

CANETTO

You, quite unmistakably, must be
The guard. How wonderful
Is the all-seeing eye!

JACOPONE

I don't take talk from your kind.

AMINA

He's a jester,
Come to amuse Madonna.

MADDELENA

Says he's a little dog,
Sniffing for hidden bones.

AMINA

Speak, little dog,
Sit up and beg.

MADDELENA

Sniff, for us, doggy,
And wag your tail.

JACOPONE

The nasty whelp!
I'll sniff him. . . .

CANETTO

[*He has played dog for them. Now he reveals himself.*]
"Little dog," my friend,
In the diminutive and common tongue
Of vulgar usage, is to say . . . Canetto. . . .
[*At this disclosure, the three women fairly cower together and* JACOPONE *falls over backward in his astonished fright.*]

JACOPONE

Gesu!

CANETTO

How far my reputation goes afield!
[*Suddenly military.*
Get hence, you trulls! !
You, fetch me your Captain, soldier!

AMINA

Oh, sir, we did not know. . . .

CANETTO

I am in charge until my master comes.
Now go.
[*The four of them shudder through the door. At the same moment* MARIA, *a bustling, buxom peasant woman enters and makes for the stair.*]
What is your name, my woman?

MARIA

I am Maria, sir.
Madonna Fiamma's waiting woman.

CANETTO

[*Seems to throw caution to the winds. His eagerness is all too evident.*]
Why, give me word of her!
Tell me that she does well, is not unhappy,
Tell me that she is still
As I remember her!

MARIA

Who are you, sir?

CANETTO

I am Madonna's friend.

MARIA

Madonna has no friends, sir, in this place.

CANETTO

But I . . . I am her friend these many years.
If I have never come before to her,
The time was never ripe before.
Now I *am* come, from Rome,
To offer her my service.
Oh, let me speak with her!

MARIA

Lord Ugolino, sir, does not allow
That any stranger shall have speech with Fiamma.

CANETTO

Why not?

MARIA

She is his prisoner.

CANETTO

She is his hostage.

MARIA

It is the same, since he will not release her.

CANETTO

Now that the Emperor's plight is somewhat grave,
The moment for her rescue has arrived.
It is so long that I have waited.
Take me to her at once . . .

MARIA

At any moment Ugolino will have come.

CANETTO

I know . . . I know . . .
We must make haste.
Before he comes
Take me to her, Maria!

MARIA

Oh, sir, you hurt my arm.

CANETTO

Forgive me, good Maria!

MARIA

[*She is about to take him up the stair. She turns.*
Do you come from her husband, Sir?
Are you Damiano's man?
[*Before* CANETTO *can answer the* CAPTAIN *has entered.*]

CAPTAIN

Messire Canetto,
You have disclosed yourself.
[*He is an old man, still erect and strong, not in any wise perturbed by* CANETTO. *He dislikes him but he is too good a soldier to show disrespect.*]

MARIA

Canetto!
[*She makes the sign of the cross.*

CANETTO

[*Concealing his annoyance.*
My disguise wearied me.
Your servants are true Ghibellines,
Captain, they know my name!
[*He notices that* MARIA *is edging her way up the stair toward* FIAMMA'S *door. He halts her.*]
Maria, do not go to Madonna now.
Get on about your business in the village
And give no messages at all.
What passed between us is forgotten,
Do you hear?

I have a means to silence chattering tongues . . .
A painful means.
Be off.

[MARIA *goes.*

CAPTAIN

I have no doubt your watch is well repaid,
Messire Canetto?

CANETTO

Yes, well enough.

[*His eyes stray toward* FIAMMA'S *door.*

I am embarked
On the supreme adventure of my life.
I am content.
I'd gratefully
Accept a cup of wine.
There *is* wine?

CAPTAIN

Of the countryside.

CANETTO

Wine of the countryside,
May anywhere produce a miracle.

CAPTAIN

[*Calls out.*

Fetch wine.

CANETTO

It's very old,
This tower.
The place could stand a siege.

CAPTAIN

These modern engines
Would knock it down about our ears.

[*Without speaking of* FIAMMA, *they both turn their heads toward the door of her chamber.*]

CANETTO

[*After a brief pause of silence.*

I'm turned around. On which side is the sea?

CAPTAIN

Below that window. Guarded.
No prisoner could escape.

CANETTO

[*Smiling.*

She is the Emperor's *hostage.*

CAPTAIN

[*A man of few words.*

I understand,
Messire Canetto.

CANETTO

That is her chamber, I suppose?

[*Again both their faces turn toward the door.*

CAPTAIN

It opens only on the gallery.
The chapel is beyond.

CANETTO

A chapel?
What priest officiates at mass?

CAPTAIN

A hermit from the mainland.

CANETTO

So?
A hermit from the mainland?
He may prove interesting,
This hermit.

He, and this good Maria,
Who, as she pleases, comes and goes.
You keep a cheerful prison here, my friend.
[*He draws a necklace of emeralds from his blouse and holds it in his hand.*]

CAPTAIN

I am a soldier, not a jailor, sir,
She is a hostage, not a prisoner.

CANETTO

I marvel less she should collaborate
So deftly with her . . . captor's . . . enemies.

CAPTAIN

How then?

[CANETTO *shows him the emeralds.*

CAPTAIN

Those emeralds. . . .
Why, Ugolino gave them to her.

CANETTO

A week ago,
I took them from an usurer in Rome.
My master woos his hostage generously,
And brings her various and precious spoils
Which, she assures him,
Amuse her.
But which, in fact,
Inevitably come to her Damiano
Who, with this Spanish Jew (I cut his throat
Only to give good measure in my bargain),
Bartered this bauble for its worth in gold
Wherewith to pay the very soldiery
Whose cross bows force the Emperor's retreat.

CAPTAIN

Gesu!

CANETTO

I mean to study
How she has reached
Damiano and resuscitated him
Out of his mire of exile.

CAPTAIN

I will pay any penalty.

CANETTO

Who speaks of penalties?
I see that you are honest.
But it were well you understood
How you have played the traitor by your laxness.
And helped the Pope against your Emperor.

CAPTAIN

I have not been disloyal.
I have known Fiamma.
I could wish that Ugolino's dealing
Had been more honorable to her,
For there are moments
When loyalty conflicts with justice.

CANETTO

Do not attempt the mingling of the two.

CAPTAIN

[*His hand to his sword hilt.*

I am a true Ghibelline.
God save the Emperor!

CANETTO

[*A dry sneer.*

No other can.

[*But* JACOPONE *enters with the wine at this moment and he changes the subject.*]

[*Stamping his foot.*

The floor is hollow.

CAPTAIN

Dungeons.

CANETTO

[*Indicates the trap.*

By this door?

CAPTAIN

[*Opens trap.*

Will you go down, sir?

CANETTO

[*Peers down.*

No. . . . Is that a rack?

[CAPTAIN *nods.*

In good repair?

CAPTAIN

[*Very dry tone.*

In excellent repair.

CANETTO

A rack at times assumes a certain value.

[CAPTAIN *closes trap.*

[JACOPONE *goes;* CANETTO *returns to the subject.*

CANETTO

This castle will be vacant in two days.
There may be fighting.

CAPTAIN

I have but four
And twenty serviceable men.

CANETTO

You will have heard,
How ill the Emperor's affairs have prospered.

CAPTAIN

I know a battle has been fought. . . .

CANETTO

And lost.
The Pope regains his Italy.
The day is to the Guelfs, my friend.
Certain enough we shall not linger here.

CAPTAIN

Germany?

[*Neither of them enjoys this prospect.*

CANETTO

Alas!
Italians do not thrive out of the sun.

CAPTAIN

And when we flee,
Madonna Fiamma?

CANETTO

With us.

[*His eyes again stray to the door of Fiamma's chamber.*]

CAPTAIN

She is a hostage honorably given by the Pope
Against an honorable return!

CANETTO

She is a victim of the tricks of war
And of the tricks of life together.
She *was* a hostage given by the Pope
To prove his holy faith.
Now, if my master holds her over-long,
It is to prove his love.

CAPTAIN

Better that he should prove
His honor and agreement.

CANETTO

The reckless circumstance of war
Plays havoc with agreement, sir,
And oftentimes is ignorant of honor.

CAPTAIN

I warn you she is much beloved
And reverently considered.

CANETTO

By your men?

CAPTAIN

By all those hereabouts.
The villagers bring her their sick.

CANETTO

[*Keenly interested.*

You mean
She heals the sick?

CAPTAIN

She has a power in her prayer.
The villagers are wont
To lie beneath her window in their boats——
She blesses them.

CANETTO

What do you think of her?

CAPTAIN

Not easily measured. . . .
Strong. . . .
Delicious, too. . . .
Fearsome as holy folk may be.

CANETTO

Young?

CAPTAIN

She has led armies to Jerusalem;
She has been Empress in Byzantium.

CANETTO

All this is much as I imagined it.
These many years and more
Since I have seen her.
Why has he spared her?

CAPTAIN

Ugolino?

CANETTO

Why?

CAPTAIN

She makes
Men better for her strong belief in man.

[*Trumpet without.*

CANETTO

That will be Ugolino, now.

CAPTAIN

I'll welcome him.

[*The* CAPTAIN *rises again and goes towards the door.*]

CANETTO

No, wait. Someone is coming.

[*He points towards the door.* MARIA *enters.*

CAPTAIN

You return,
Maria, from the village?

MARIA

Captain, yes.

CAPTAIN

Go to Madonna, then.

MARIA

[*Breathless with news.*

They say the Emperor
Has been defeated.
In the public square
We have been singing . . . and the hermit preached.

CAPTAIN

Why did you sing?

MARIA

Folk should rejoice. And all the burghers came
Down from the city and shook their spears
Against this castle.
Folk don't like the master. Then *he* came.

CAPTAIN

Ugolino?

MARIA

M-m, and scattered them.
And there's a tale afoot to say
That he will take Madonna Fiamma
Away with him tomorrow.
It is not true, good Captain?

CAPTAIN

Oh, I hope
It is not true.

MARIA

And then the master
Called for a boat and followed me across.
But I made better speed.

CAPTAIN

Go up . . . go up, Maria.

MARIA

They say the wars are ended
The people dance and everyone eats cakes.
It's very gay.

CAPTAIN

No doubt.

MARIA

You do not think.
Madonna must go with them?

CAPTAIN

With them?

MARIA

Sure,
Being the Emperor's men,
They cannot linger here.
They say an army's on march from Rome.

CAPTAIN

Madonna will be waiting for her silks.

MARIA

Yes, Captain . . . Yes . . .

[*She disappears through the door of* FIAMMA*'s chamber. As she opens it, the place is seen as light and color. It grows darker. Another trumpet sounds.*]

CANETTO

And so with silks
We while away Madonna's time.
She who's Damiano's wife,
Damiano who destroys us
And drives the Emperor from Italy. . . .

[*Turns suddenly with a snarl on the* CAPTAIN.

You fool, you swine, you lout! If I
Should put you to the rack . . .

[*The* CAPTAIN'S *calm restores* CANETTO *to himself.*
For all his victory,
Damiano shall not have a hair of her.
Go, greet your master properly.

[*The* CAPTAIN *goes.*

[CANETTO *glares after him for a moment.*
Madonna's silks!

[*He softens. Another trumpet sounds. He smiles to himself and listens at the door. He swings about abruptly and bounds up the stairs to* FIAMMA'S *door. His hands seem to sink into its panels, his breath is hot against it, he speaks in a strained whisper.*]

Fiamma, three men have loved you,
Your husband and my master and myself . . .
Which of us will you love
To-morrow?

CAPTAIN

[*Off stage.*

Fall in, men!
Attention!
Front!
Lord Baron Ugolino,
I welcome you.

UGOLINO

[*Crying, off stage.*

Fiamma! Fiamma!

[CANETTO *has just time to turn and welcome his master.*]

[*Whereupon* UGOLINO *enters gorgeously. His mail glitters like silver. He wears a magnificent mantle. Jewels shine at his throat and in his belt and his head is bare so that his fair, curling hair falls to his shoulders. He is a northern type, a physique of great strength, a face of beauty ravaged by dissolute living. He is still young. He is ac-*

companied by two guards dressed in the colors of the Emperor with the black lion on their chests. One of these carries his master's sword, the other his helmet.]

[UGOLINO *comes quickly centre as though he did not see anyone in the gloom. The guards advance slightly. The light of torches shines through the open door.*]

UGOLINO

[*His authority vanishing. He is only weary and distraught.*]

Oh, Canetto, mine.
I have such need of counsel.

[*He pauses and his eyes turn to* FIAMMA'S *door.*

Fiamma. . . . Fiamma. . . .

CANETTO

Master, you said
That you had need of counsel?

UGOLINO

I said? What matter I said?
Canetto, have you seen her?

CANETTO

Seen whom, dear master?

UGOLINO

Fiamma. . . .

CANETTO

No.

UGOLINO

No? . . . No.
You are right, Canetto.

CANETTO

You come direct from Rome?

UGOLINO

From Rome.

CANETTO

I, too. . . .

UGOLINO

I have seen the towns' processions with their banners:
I have seen martyred saints to sicken me
Flung on the air from battlements and towers,
And girls that dance with garlands,
And nobles kissing burghers in the streets,
And I have heard the crowds
That howl hosannahs of thanksgiving
To celebrate our defeat. . . .
I, the leader of the Ghibellines,
I was in *flight* before them!!!

CAPTAIN

Ah!

CANETTO

There is no wrath abroad.
But only joy more terrible than wrath,
Against such joy we are the drifting smoke
Before the winds of May.

UGOLINO

We must make haste, Canetto.

CAPTAIN

You came here unmolested,
Master?

UGOLINO

No. . . . One excellent encounter.
Behind the hills.

Yonder.
They ambushed us. . . .
Two score of them—or more.
I do not rightly know,
My sight was blinded by their festivals
That I had seen along the road.
I sent them squealing.
My horse's hooves were gummed with them.
Their blood spattered my hair.

CAPTAIN

The Pope's men?

UGOLINO

Damiano's.

CANETTO

Was he there
To lead them?

UGOLINO

He's in Rome. . . .
Damiano is in Rome. . . .
He whispers to the Pope. . . .
[*His eyes are now fixed once more upon the door of* FIAMMA'S *chamber.*]
The Pope has sent
To bid me give her up.
[*Almost a cry of pain.*
Oh, I can't live and give her up!

CANETTO

I do not think Damiano is in Rome.

UGOLINO

I know he is.

CANETTO

He will have left by this.

Master I crave your leave
To speak alone with you.

UGOLINO

Go, all of you. . . . Canetto has command.
Put down my sword.
[*The guard lays the sword upon the table.*

CAPTAIN

And it is true, we leave
The castle in two days?

CANETTO

Await me in my closet, Captain. . . . Go.
Directly thither. I shall come to you.
Captain, double the guard!

CAPTAIN

My Lord. . . .
[*He goes. The* GUARD *follows.* CANETTO *and* UGOLINO *are alone together.*]

CANETTO

[*Looking after them.*
My worthy Captain, living, you shall not
Escape my sight.

UGOLINO

But *he* is faithful. . . .

CANETTO

He has known Fiamma.
She is like the summer sun.
She shines, and in an hour
The flower of man's loyalty is withered.
In all the armies of the Guelfs
There is no sword so perilous as her smile.

And I grow curious to learn
How this may be.
For I have never seen her.
Only a glimpse. . .
So long ago.

UGOLINO

A glimpse were not enough to fathom her,
As you will learn, Canetto.

[*His discouragement shakes him. His eyes again turn to the door of* FIAMMA'S *room.*]

Fiamma! The flame
That scorches up my spirit.
What has she done to me?
I have been strong . . . before. . . .
Am I a weakling now?
She saps the power of my arms, she saps
My strength and all my will.
Three times I have come here to her and three
Times gone away again, repulsed.
Only her eyes!
They are enough!
Oh, when I fight, I see them then, and then
My heart turns weak and sick.
What has she done to me?
Honor or shame, what do they mean, Canetto?

[*A desperate, hysterical laugh breaks from his lips.*

I have forgotten.

CANETTO

[*He has listened, his eyes upon his master, contempt on his lips. Now he will bring the conversation to his ends once more.*]

Honor or shame? Who knows what they may be?
Meantime,
We'll keep the Captain in our company.

UGOLINO

I shall trust none of them but you.

CANETTO

I do not think Damiano is in Rome. . . .
Master, I am quite certain he will come,
Here. . . to this island. . . and this very night.

UGOLINO

How do you know?

CANETTO

My eyes, Master, my ears, my sense of touch
And various other things.

UGOLINO

And if he come?

CANETTO

My plans are fashioned in a close mosaic.
I hold the little stone of his escape,
But I can find no place to fit it in.

UGOLINO

How will it be?

CANETTO

How will a sea-gull light upon a wave?
Throw food, and watch. . . .

UGOLINO

Throw food?

CANETTO

He knows you have another hostage. . . . now. . . .

UGOLINO

Another hostage? Whom?

CANETTO

His son, Fiorenzo.

UGOLINO

Oh! Canetto!

CANETTO

I was not idle while I stayed in Rome,
I sought . . . I found . . . I stole . . . his little son. . . .
Madonna Fiamma's son . . . where he was hidden.

UGOLINO

Where is the child?

CANETTO

Here in this castle serving me as page. . . .
Is it not comical?
I think that I may give him to Madonna.
It were expedient means
To win her to your ends and to prevent
Her plans of rescue.

[*Even* CANETTO *must smile at this and glance at the door.*]

UGOLINO

You do not know how strong she is, Canetto. . . .

CANETTO

Must you be weak? Take her or . . . kill her . . . Master.

UGOLINO

Belike I shall kill her some day.

[*Trumpets without and enter the* CAPTAIN *and a* SOLDIER.]

CAPTAIN

Begging your pardon, Master,
Here's a messenger from Rome.

UGOLINO

My man?

CAPTAIN

A nuncio from the Pope.

UGOLINO

These Guelfs
Are thirsty for our blood!
Dare we refuse him entrance?

CANETTO

Is he alone?

[CAPTAIN *looks to the* SOLDIER *to speak.*

SOLDIER

There is one other with him.
The townsfolk, too, are coming in their boats.

UGOLINO

This is *my* house—*my* house!

CANETTO

Good master, pray
Take counsel of me now.

[*To the* CAPTAIN.

Bring in the messenger
And quickly. . . .

[*The* CAPTAIN *and the* SOLDIER *go out.*

UGOLINO

He is come for her.

CANETTO

But will go hence with empty hands.

UGOLINO

You are my wits, you are my eyes, Canetto.
And all my judgments.

CANETTO

Now I promise you,
For that fair tribute,
This very night of nights you shall attain
Your two desires. . .
Your vengeance on your enemy in blood,
And . . . afterwards . . . your woman.

UGOLINO

Canetto!

CANETTO

[*On his toes, exultant, strangely and thrillingly young.*]
Oh, love, headlong, vehement,
You triumph over reason, over shame,
And hold them impotent, and you possess
The heart and tongue and vision of a man
And you exact his martyrdom and laugh!

[*The last lines have rung out over trumpets prolonged and a subdued turmoil off-stage. At the end the* NUNCIO *enters, preceded by the* CAPTAIN *and followed by two of* UGOLINO'S *soldiers, with lighted torches.*]

[*The* NUNCIO *is a churchman, not so old as the* CAPTAIN. *He wears the clothes of any horseman except for the necklace and insignia of his ecclesiastical position.*]

CANETTO

Your Grace is welcome. . . .

NUNCIO

Which one of you may be
The Baron Ugolino?

CANETTO

Here is my master.

NUNCIO

My business is with you.

[*He draws a parchment scroll from his cloak and holds it toward the surly* UGOLINO.]

UGOLINO

Canetto, read.

[CANETTO *snatches the scroll.*

NUNCIO

[*His hand to his sword.*

Canetto?

[CANETTO *smiles, bows, and opens scroll.*

Sir, you are bold
To speak to me.

CANETTO

As you
To enter here, your Grace. . . . But
This is no rat trap set for clergymen. . . .
Were you sent by Damiano?

NUNCIO

By His Holiness.

CANETTO

It is the same.

[*To* UGOLINO.

The usual demand.

UGOLINO

For Fiamma?

CANETTO

Shall I make answer, Master?

UGOLINO

Yes.

CANETTO

Go back again to Rome. . . .
Fiamma is Ugolino's hostage still,

Who ever comes
In ten days time to Trent,
Upon the border of the north,
Madonna Fiamma will await him there,
But thither she must go with us.

NUNCIO

My lord,
You send this answer?

UGOLINO

Yes.

NUNCIO

And you receive.
The messenger of the Pope so easily
Your servant answers him?

UGOLINO

Yes. . . . Yes. . . .

CANETTO

These days along the roads of Italy
Fiamma will give protection more worth while
Than any word of any Pope.

NUNCIO

I warn
You, Baron Ugolino.

UGOLINO

I've heard enough.

[*Increasing commotion in the distance and cries.*

CANETTO

Safety, my friend, that is the question now.
You know our situation.
We ride tomorrow. Say so to the Pope. . . .
Madonna Fiamma is unhurt and goes
Willingly to the border,
And bids Damiano send to Trent for her.

NUNCIO

If I demand a word with her.

CANETTO

Your Grace,
I must refuse. *My* word is all.

[*Commotion without louder.*

NUNCIO

The fisherfolk and villagers
Know of your plan. You will not pass
With Fiamma.

CANETTO

I stake my sword against a fisher's net
At any time.

NUNCIO

I am the vicar of the vicar of Christ. . . .
You do assail a greater word than mine.

CANETTO

I proffer you a cup of wine, your Grace.

NUNCIO

Which I refuse.

CANETTO

[*Having filled one glass, lifts it.*
We must each profit as we may and each
One yield his tribute to the other's state.

[*He drinks.*

[JACOPONE *has entered and whispered to the Captain.*]

NUNCIO

I shall return more forcefully.

CANETTO

Your Grace. . . .
Delivering your answer to the Pope,
Say that you had a courteous reception.

NUNCIO

A moment's parley with Madonna Fiamma?

CANETTO

You deserve credit for persistence, sir.

CAPTAIN

Here is a delegation
Of village folk and burghers
Concerned for Fiamma,
Demanding that no harm
Shall come to her.

UGOLINO

Send them away!

CANETTO

A moment, Master. . . .

[*A moment of thought.*

Your Grace, I reconsider.

CAPTAIN

You know how many men I have.

CANETTO

And they?

CAPTAIN

Some hundreds in their boats.

NUNCIO

I'll call to them.

CANETTO

And calling take your leave of life.
Desperate men chastise their enemies

With prompt decision . . .
How numerous the delegation, Captain?

CAPTAIN

Eight.

CANETTO

Why, then,
Madonna Fiamma will receive them here.

UGOLINO

No!

[CANETTO *motions to* JACOPONE *who goes to obey the order.*]

CANETTO

You see how well defeated men may learn
To bow before the dictates of defeat.
An Emperor bows before a Pope,
A Ghibelline before a Guelf.
Now you may speak
With Fiamma, though I said you nay
A moment since. We drink, your Grace, to peace
Restored, to battle fronts not yet aligned,
To armies not yet raised. . . .

[*He drinks. The hubbub is just off stage.*
Master, here are your loyal subjects.

[*First one, a burgher with a short spear, then two farmers and a fisherman with clubs, then three women and a boy, enter. Guards follow them. Other guards stand in the passage.*]

[*It has grown much darker. The tower is all purple with the twilight. The figures in the foreground are lighted only by the fitful glare of the firelight. The window shines, a black arched radiance of violet sky. Very softly, as from a great distance, borne on a wind that falls and rises, the first bells of vespers come over the water.*]

A Man

Madonna Fiamma! Madonna Fiamma!

Another

Queen. . . .

A Woman

Oh, gracious lady. . . .

A Third Man

Protector of the catch. . . .

Another Woman

Lady of Consolation. . . .

Canetto

Draw back, my lord, it were the safer course
They should not see you in this mood of theirs.
Draw back and watch. . . .

Various Cries from the Crowd

Madonna Fiamma . . . speak to us, Madonna. . . .
Oh, come and speak to us and bend
Your face upon our faces . . . Here . . . and here,
Madonna Fiamma. . . . Listen to our need. . . .
Madonna Fiamma, do not leave us. . . .
We have come, Madonna, we have come
To offer you protection.
You shall not go away against your will. . . .
The Emperor has fallen. . . . Fiamma. . . . Fiamma. . . .
Madonna, star of evening on the sea. . . .
Oh, little plant that we have loved. . . .
Madonna Fiamma. . . .

[*The bells are louder. Very slowly the door of* Fiamma's *chamber swings open and we see her.*

A sigh goes up at her appearance. The peasants fall on their knees.]

[*If we have ever stood in a great gothic church of Northern France and looked down the length of the nave at the apse window which glorifies the Virgin Mary, we shall think of that moment in this first glimpse of* FIAMMA. *Indeed, she is very like the Virgin of some glowing window when the sun is bright behind it. She stands against the light and color of her chamber. Her beautiful head is held very high. She is queenly. But she is kind, too. Her eyes and hands say so. And she is not quite as other women. There is an aura about her head and all the splendor of her dress seems to smile upon the darkness of the tower. She advances slowly to the head of the stair.*]

UGOLINO

Oh, see. . . .

CANETTO

Hush. . . .

UGOLINO

Fiamma. . . . Fiamma. . . .

[*These are whispers above the complete silence of the moment.*

CANETTO

A meditative sorrow. . . .
How beautiful she is!

UGOLINO

Is she not beautiful, Canetto? Like
The Virgin Mary in her queenliness. . . .
And she is just and altogether human. . . .

CANETTO

She is a woman. . . .

A MAN

Lady of Glory . . . lady of mystery. . . .

A WOMAN

Madonna, say you will not leave us. . . .

FIAMMA

[*She does not answer. She has come partly down the stair and the strange light of her presence seems still to shine about her. She looks down upon the speakers and smiles.*]

A MAN

We shall save you, Madonna. . . .
We shall save you, from them. . . .
We shall bring the hermit here to lead us. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Her head, her arms, something about her seems to say that there is no need.*]

A WOMAN

See, Madonna, see. . . .
My son can walk again. . . .
You prayed for him . . . he walks again, Madonna.
Oh, thank you, bless you. . . .

FIAMMA

[*She sees and is glad.*

ANOTHER WOMAN

[*Coming forward with her baby wrapped like the bambini of della Robbia.*]
Pray for him, too, Madonna, he is sick. . . .
He is so little. . . .

FIAMMA

[*She takes the child in her arms, for she has come to the foot of the stair now. The* WOMAN *kneels at her feet. She holds the child tenderly and prays.*]

NUNCIO

This is mystery . . .
She stands upon the silver threshold. She
Is marvellous and admirable. . . .
Madonna Fiamma,
I am come to you from the throne of Peter,
I have seen a wonderful thing here,
I have seen peace and beauty and reverence . . .
I am the church, Madonna, and I kneel
Reverently at your feet. . . .

FIAMMA

[*She turns and looks at him.*

NUNCIO

You will be saved, Madonna. . . .
You will be saved, tomorrow. . . .
Men will come fighting if need be.

FIAMMA

[*Does something frighten her? It seems so.*

A MAN

We will save, you, Madonna Fiamma. . . .
We the burghers of the city will save you. . . .
We will come with the weapons of our masters
And break the gates apart,
And you will live forever in our midst
And make our city whole and sweet.

FIAMMA

[*She smiles now and shakes her head.*

WOMAN

What does it matter if our men
Perish for you, Madonna?

FIAMMA

[*Her hand goes toward the woman in protest.*

A MAN

The while we live there can no peril come
To frighten you. . . .

A MAN

Command us. . . .

ANOTHER

Speak your will to us. . . .

ANOTHER

Speak, Madonna . . . what is your will. . . .

NUNCIO

Spring of all mercies, beacon of all glories,
Fountain of all restoring strength,
Word of all wisdom. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Because at this moment the wind seems to have strengthened again, the vespers bells are louder. She lifts her hand for silence, then, in her low, vibrant voice, she intones the Pater Noster in Latin. After the first two or three phrases, the peasants and the* NUNCIO *follow her and, later, the guards, the last of whom to stand falls on his knees as the curtain descends very slowly.*]

THE SECOND ACT

The curtain rises again as soon as may be. The scene and situation are unchanged, the action has not been interrupted.

FIAMMA

[*The prayer finished, she looks once intensely over the kneeling peasants, lifts her hand in a blessing and farewell and turns very slowly to go up the stair to the window.*]

[*One by one the peasants rise to their feet. They seem completely calmed. One or two of them, in pantomime seem to beg* FIAMMA'S *leave to rescue her. One or two threaten the soldiers with their fists. They murmur about the hermit and say to one another, "He must be fetched to speak with her." They go.*]

MARIA

[*Who has come down the stair from* FIAMMA'S *room, urges the peasants off.*]

She would not have your suffering on her heart.
You hurt her when you ask her.
Go. You will make her weep.

CANETTO

Be very certain
Damiano will come here tonight,
Master.

UGOLINO

Why then?

CANETTO

You have the pair of them.

UGOLINO

She is worth more than vengeance.

CANETTO

Go quickly, now,
And make no sound at all. I'll speak with her.
[UGOLINO *protests in pantomime.*
Give me a little time. I guarantee
She shall grow amiable.
Do you attend the Nuncio.

[UGOLINO *goes after the* NUNCIO, *his last look at* FIAMMA.

[*As* CANETTO *stands beside the fire, his dark cloak drawn about him, he seems almost a part of the arras.*]

[FIAMMA *stands in the gallery, now, her lovely head silhouetted against the luminous twilight sky. The bells continue faintly and do not cease entirely until* CANETTO *speaks to her later. The interior of the tower is becoming more and more exquisitely blue. The single bright light in the scene is the shrine beside the door of* FIAMMA'S *chamber.*]

FIAMMA

The scent of seaweed weighs the warm, sweet air,
Lonely and beautiful, the hush of dark
Descends on all created life,
Another day is gone behind the hills,
Another wind is silent on the sea.
I hear you, bells of vespers, and I know
The eloquence of destiny is loud
In your deep voices;

Your benediction shares its peace with me
And leaves me strong to breathe
The infinite beatitude of night;
And blessed beauty glistens on the world
And on my hair and lips and hands and eyes
Like dew upon the flowers of the dawn,
Like April on the yearning of the earth
With tears of life that comes again to life
Rebuilded and renewed.

MARIA

I go to watch, Madonna.
I know it cannot fail tonight,
Just at the change o' the watch,
Just as you planned it.
Ah, Damiano said,
"How crafty is my Fiamma
To know when men are sleepiest!"

FIAMMA

[*Without turning from her contemplation of the evening sea.*]
Ah, he said
That I am crafty?

MARIA

Are you not, Madonna?

FIAMMA

I do not think so. Only wise
As women may be.

MARIA

Be of good cheer, Madonna.
Tonight is sure.

[MARIA *goes directly out.*

FIAMMA

Oh, Damiano,
We shall remember, afterwards, these months
Of my captivity and your wandering
As a time after illness that has been
Wherein we gathered strength again for life
Together, strength for faith,
Each in the other . . .
Stars who bear witness to my weariness
Bring us together once before we die,
I was not born for loneliness, my youth
Is almost gone. Before it passes quite,
Bring him again to me . . . tonight . . . you stars. . . .

[*Perhaps the wind rises once again, perhaps the Host is elevated in some chapel on the shore, for the bells swell out.* FIAMMA *drops her head in prayer.*]

CANETTO

[*Coming forward.*

Madonna. . . .

FIAMMA

You, Maria?

CANETTO

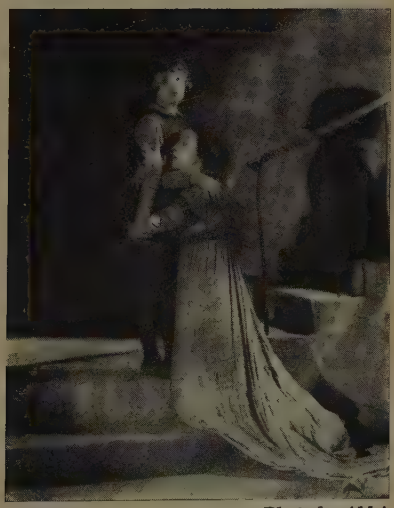
The dark falls swiftly on the sea, Madonna.

[FIAMMA *turns and, for the first time, notices* CANETTO. *She comes to the edge of the gallery and looks down upon him. The fire has flared up.*]

CANETTO

Will you come down to me?
A sea bird, balanced on distended wings
Might float into your reverent seclusion
And, by comparison with your fair grace,
Seem a distorted and obnoxious thing.
Shall I, who am a graceless man,

DESIGN FOR THE SCENE BY ROBERT EDMUND JONES



"YOU SHALL BE MY PROTECTOR NOW!"

Photo by Abbé

Bred in the rough adventure of the world,
Who only, humbly sue the privilege
Of a brief word, Madonna, desecrate
The shrine your presence sanctifies?

FIAMMA

You speak
Graciously, sir. A prisoner
Is scarcely loth to see a stranger's face
To talk a moment's time beyond confinement.
[*She comes down slowly, pausing at least once to look more closely at* CANETTO.]

CANETTO

You do me honor and I bear you tidings.
My master, Ugolino, craves permission
To sup this evening with you in your tower.

FIAMMA

Am I to welcome him?

CANETTO

But if I brought you other news of one
More near your heart, Madonna?

FIAMMA

News of whom?

CANETTO

[*The briefest pause.*
Damiano.

FIAMMA

Of Damiano?

CANETTO

[*Nods and another brief pause.*
Who is dead.

FIAMMA

Damiano who is . . . dead? I must have proof
Of that. I do not think
Damiano could have died and I not know.
I think his passing spirit in the air
Would have come here to whisper me farewell.

CANETTO

How if I give you proof?

FIAMMA

The word alone
Inspires me with no terror. I have seen
A deal of death and had my heart and mind
Begirt with horror.

CANETTO

[*He displays the emeralds.*

These are the emeralds which, I know not how,
Came from this tower to his hands.

FIAMMA

See how they lie there, limply, yet so hard!
How bright they are! It is as though you dipped
A cup of water from the deepest sea
And, in your hand, congealed it.

CANETTO

Do you know them?

FIAMMA

Do you say
My husband, dying, sent them to me?

CANETTO

Yes.

FIAMMA

I am not readily credulous of sorrow.

CANETTO

Alas, that I am sorrow's messenger!

FIAMMA

Do you know me, sir?
I am that Fiamma, of some fame,
Once on a time, who followed the Crusades
And reigned as Empress in Byzantium.
I have long floated upon turbulent waters,
So long, these very rocks,
Upon whose scarring surface I am dashed,
Seem to me something of a haven, half
Solicitous to comfort me.
Yet I am still Fiamma.
And this is strength to me, and gives
Me more than ordinary fortitude,
As if it were some special test of God
To prove my spirit.
And you do wrong to scoff before your time;
These emeralds are no property of yours,
But of a certain Spanish Jew in Rome,
To whom my husband sold them.

CANETTO

You confess?

FIAMMA

Of what avail denial?

CANETTO

You are brave.

FIAMMA

Who meets a lie with truth has drawn a sword
Upon a man unarmed.

CANETTO

Am I outwitted?

FIAMMA

I do not know the measure of your wits.
I only know the arms of honesty
Are long. It may be you are overreached,
Messire Canetto.

CANETTO

[*He looks upon her with unfeigned admiration.*
I cannot lie
Successfully to you, it seems. You know
Too much of me . . .
I will cast paltry things aside,
Truth, yes, and honor too
(Of men, not women),
And send them whistling down
To splash the offal of the silly world.

FIAMMA

It is so long since I have laughed. I looked
To find a mighty villain, sir, in you . . .
I find a boastful youth.
[*She sits at the table and laughs at him.*

CANETTO

No man is bad
Enough to justify his reputation.
There you perceive the cross the wicked man
Must bear—that he is doomed
Forever to fall short in wickedness!
[*He has become very gay and disarming.*

FIAMMA

Alas, poor sinner!

CANETTO

Canetto has become a pleasant fellow,
Like all repentant sinners, still

A little proud of sin, a little fond
Of sinful memories.
There is no vice was not a virtue once!
But I rejoice. I shall have found a friend
Where I had sought a victim. God be praised!
The bladder has been pricked! In you, I meet
My first antagonist. . . .

FIAMMA

Why, then . . .

CANETTO

[*Aflame.*

We'll play
A while upon the lips of death before
Death swallows us? I am a jongleur born
And bred and trained and practised. I have gone
To Chartres on pilgrimage and acted there
The Miracles of Our Lady. I have been
Court jester to an emperor and a king
And confidant in the secret ways of states,
And on the road once more and played buffoon
In village squares of France and Italy,
And sung a Roland for an Oliver
In Michael's monastery in the north . . .
And I have trained
Horses to war and dogs to trickery
And thieved and mocked and loved and laughed until
My very livelihood was impudence.
[*Shrugs his shoulders a little sadly.*
But jongleurs have no civil rights—alas, . . .
I am a man. Man must have civil rights.
So I turned murderer and respectable.
This for my lord, Ugolino,
Whom I serve as faithfully as I may,
Half as lieutenant, half as jester, half
As privy counsellor and brother in arms.

And when we move about
The pilgrim crowded thoroughfares of Rome,
Dressed in bright scarlet, I ride on before
And play my lute,
And do his bidding otherwise, without
The least compunction, very glad,
To have regained my civil rights, because
To prance upon the air
Were a scant pleasure to the lookers-on.
To the performer, scanter still. Perhaps
I may yet die of palsy in a bed
And, with all due serenity, look back
Upon these varied images of myself,
Dancing across the nations of the world.

FIAMMA

[*She has laughed at his story but her face at the end is grim.*]
Is this Canetto?

[*A bow from him.*

Vagabond!

[*A deeper bow.*

I understand you now.

[*She rises, an Empress.*

And you would tell me his great heart is stilled!
As if I should not know!

CANETTO

I find
Your high defiance admirable. . . .

FIAMMA

And true.

CANETTO

You *are* proud.

FIAMMA

No, very humble.

CANETTO

Yet you frustrate my lord
At every step.

FIAMMA

Your master is a soldier of renown,
For which I honor him. I would I might
Find him more honorable in himself.

CANETTO

How well *I* understand my *master* now!

FIAMMA

Why, sir, I hope you do . . .

CANETTO

How you disarm him as you now disarm
My subtle craft, Madonna. . . .

FIAMMA

Are you crafty?
More than your clumsy master's tool?

CANETTO

Much more . . . as I might be . . . to you, Madonna. . . .

[FIAMMA *is bitterly amused.*

You are not kind, Madonna.

FIAMMA

Am I not?

CANETTO

You are suspicious.

FIAMMA

Ah, you guess that, too?

CANETTO

I crave your confidence.

FIAMMA

My confidence!

CANETTO

Why not?
What deep assurance can I give
To make you trust me?

FIAMMA

None, I thank you, sir.

CANETTO

Have you not heard
The story of the sinner turned a saint?

FIAMMA

A saint?

CANETTO

The very meat
And substance of all Christian doctrine!
I claim no halo.
Good deeds are out of fashion nowadays,
We are not knights and ladies anymore,
But simple men and women,
Desirable and desirous.

[*His eyes appraise her. She shudders.*

FIAMMA

Ah, I read
The riddle now . . .

CANETTO

You read . . .

FIAMMA

Reluctantly.

CANETTO

Did you now know
That it would end so?
Are not these emeralds symbolical
Of such an ending?

FIAMMA

[*Perturbed.*

You are unkind to mock me.

CANETTO

Let me swear
To my sincerity.

FIAMMA

If, sir, you are sincere, I do not lack
In thanks to you. If not, I bear no grudge.

CANETTO

And that is all?
I am not fortunate with womankind. . . .
I bring you proof of my devotion. . . .

[*He pockets the emeralds.*

FIAMMA

No. . . .

CANETTO

And you shall learn what quality of service
You thoughtlessly refuse.

[*Calling out.*

Send me my page!

FIAMMA

Have done. . . .

[*In spite of herself her uneasiness grows during* CANETTO'S *next words.*]

CANETTO

It is a boy, a child . . .
I'll rear him as a pander or a knave,
Which, I have not decided.
He serves me well already.
But, for the present while, he is my gift
To be your page,

Or what you will of him.

[FIORENZO, *the child, a boy of eight or nine years, has appeared in the doorway. He wears the motley of a page. He halts there, frightened and pale.*]

FIAMMA

[*A loud cry of horror.*

Ah!

CANETTO

[*He grasps* FIORENZO *and drags him into the centre of the stage.*]

Do not cry out, Madonna!
There is no harm in him.
I stole him for you. . . .
He's nobly born and will therefore become
The better servant . . . if you beat him well,
As I have beaten him.

[*He becomes more than ever the strolling player in the ensuing scene, dancing and laughing here and there on the stage, revelling in the most adroit jest of his career.*]

FIAMMA

[*She reels suddenly and cries out in very desperate terror.*]

My son . . . my son. . . .

FIORENZO

Are you my mother?

FIAMMA

[*She is on her knees, her arms tight about the child's neck.*]

Fiorenzo, oh, my little son, Fiorenzo! . . .
And in my prison. . . . Why?

CANETTO

[*Quite naturally gleeful.*

You ask, Madonna?
Accepting him, you make a fair exchange.
His life against
Your splendid liberty of soul. . . .
This is the lever of your obedience.

FIAMMA

For shame be silent. . . . Oh, Fiorenzo. . . .

FIORENZO

Mother!

CANETTO

[*More and more delighted.*

You will obey no matter what command.

FIAMMA

Leave me . . .

CANETTO

When I ordain . . .
You must accept my ordinance . . .
Even if I? . . . but time attends my wish . . .
We are no longer hurried.

FIAMMA

You planned this cleverly. . . .

CANETTO

Oh, this superb Canetto!
Madonna Fiamma, am I not superb?
But, for the nonce, you sup. . . .

FIAMMA

Wicked!

CANETTO

. . . Agreeably with my master.

FIAMMA

Leave us . . .

CANETTO

I plan . . .

FIAMMA

Leave us, I say!

CANETTO

. . . I weave . . .

FIAMMA

In God's name, think . . .
He is a child.

CANETTO

I am a spider in my web . . .

[*His gestures are grotesque and horribly comic. He begins prancing about.*]

FIAMMA

Buffoon!

CANETTO

[*A shout of triumph.*

BUFFOON!!!
Madonna, so I am. . . .
All hail buffoonery!!
Long life to the buffoon! Bring lights. . . . Bring lights!
The mystery is set,
Only the subject changed. We might have played
The pastoral "Flight to Egypt."
What if we stay behind in Herod's court
And watch "The Massacre of the Innocents."

FIAMMA

Fiorenzo, are you frightened?

CANETTO

Tomorrow Germany!

FIAMMA

How long since you
Have had your mother . . .

CANETTO

Let me bless you . . .

FIAMMA

You are grown strong, my son . . .
You shall be my protector, now . . .

FIORENZO

Where is my father?

FIAMMA

He will come in time.

CANETTO

There's not a doubt of that!

FIORENZO

It is so dark here. . . .

FIAMMA

Oh, no, tomorrow will be gay, my son.

CANETTO

This is the end, Madonna, of your hopes,
The rainbows of calamity are out!
Lights . . . bring us lights. . . . I'll see
My triumph brightly! . . . for I meet
My first antagonist and vanquish her. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Furiously.*

Call me my woman here. . . .

[*A commotion is audible in the castle.* AMINA *enters bearing two tapers. She sets them in stands*

upon the table looking curiously at the child and the kneeling FIAMMA. *A* SOLDIER *comes with a torch.*]

CANETTO

Maria, hither!
Your mistress calls you! Lights!

FIAMMA

Oh, God, I cry to You for justice. . . .

CANETTO

Obedience, Madonna. . . .
Remember the stern word. . . .

FIAMMA

You beast . . . you thief . . . you coward. . . .

CANETTO

Sparks from the anvil of the flaming sword!

[AMINA *has withdrawn with the* SOLDIER *to the doorway.* MARIA *breaks through between them.*]

FIAMMA

Maria!

[*Her voice chokes.*

CANETTO

[*Close to* FIAMMA, *he speaks his directions very quickly.*]

Let there be no misunderstanding. All
Must be as clear as fine French glass.
Your son is come to bear you company,
Because his Holiness recklessly demands
The hostage's return, because my master
Will not consent to this, because, tomorrow,
You ride with us. But presently
The Nuncio of the Pope will speak with you. . . .
You will refuse to give my *master* up. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Lifts her head during* CANETTO'S *instructions and now rises to her feet quite steadily.*]

My good Maria, here's my little son,
Suddenly brought to me from Rome. . . .
To comfort me. He lodges in my chamber.
We must find means to order things
A little differently because of him.
It does not greatly matter, I suppose.
Now lay him in my bed. He is so sturdy. . . .
Whatever else befall us in this place,
He must go safely out. . . .
Go, my Fiorenzo, go; Maria's kind. . . .
She has red cherries for you. . . .

FIORENZO

Mother. . . .

MARIA

Oh, Madonna. . . .

[*In the meanwhile, too, very faintly at first, comes the sound of singing on the sea, the mingled voices of men and women singing the crusade hymn of Adam de St. Victor.*]

SINGERS

Ave, Virgo singularis,
Mater nostri Salutaris,
Quae vocaris Stella Maris,
  Stella non erratica;
Nos in hujas vitae mari
Non permitte naufragari,
Sed pro nobis Salutari
  Tuo semper supplica!

Saevit mare, fremunt venti,
Fructus surgunt turbulenti;

Navis currit, sed currenti
  Tot occurrunt obvia!
Hic sirenes voluptatis,
Draco, canes cum piratis,
Mortem pene desperatis
  Haec intentant omnia.

Post abyssos, nunc ad coelum
Furens unda fert phaselum;
Nutat malus, fluit velum,
  Nautae cessat opera;
Contabescit in his malis
Homo noster animalis;
Tu nos, Mater spiritalis,
  Pereuntes libera!

[UGOLINO *appears in the doorway. His face is flushed, his hair disordered, his hands are restless.*]

FIAMMA

Lord Baron Ugolino, now, I learn,
From your lieutenant's word, that very soon
I am to follow you to Germany.
Well, it is well, I say, and say no more.

[*In the meantime* MARIA *and* FIORENZO *have gone together up the stair.*]

CANETTO

Said I not so, my master?

UGOLINO

Fiamma, my Fiamma, you will not regret. . . .
We two shall overpower all regrets. . . .
You will be Empress. . . .

CANETTO

Go, one of you, and fetch the Nuncio here. . . .

[*A* SOLDIER *goes.*

UGOLINO

Tomorrow will see armies take the field.
Fiamma, for love of you.

CANETTO

We feast and drink tonight.
Children of shadows, creatures of the smoke,
Flowers by candlelight. . . .

UGOLINO

Oh, like enough, tomorrow will be foolish.
[*Beneath* FIAMMA's *direct gaze he flinches.*

CANETTO

No more,
Dear master, she is honey, now, and wax. . . .

FIAMMA

Oh, God, why is it that I cannot hate?

UGOLINO

You can no longer hate me, Fiamma?
[*The* NUNCIO *enters, led by the* SOLDIER.

NUNCIO

Madonna Fiamma,
You know my business. Let me bear your answer.

FIAMMA

Who is this man?

CANETTO

This is the messenger from his Holiness.
And indirectly from Damiano, too. . . .

FIAMMA

. . . What must I say?

CANETTO

No more than I have said already. . . .
His Grace is still
A veritable doubting Thomas,
Will not believe that you accompany
Us of your own free will nor that you bid
Damiano find you out
In Trent in ten days' time.

NUNCIO

Is that your word,
Madonna Fiamma?

FIAMMA

[*Her eyes beg for his understanding.*
Do you read the stars?
They are so bright, they seem
To glitter with so little meaning, yet,
By devious interpretation, say
Such diverse, beautiful and mysterious things. . .
That is my word to you. . .

CANETTO

Madonna Fiamma, riddles but confuse
An obvious issue.

NUNCIO

Lady . . . do you say? . . .

FIAMMA

No more. . .

CANETTO

A word, Madonna, I beseech
You by the right I have to ask
Some petty favors of you. . . . Let there be
Conviction in your voice.

FIAMMA

[*Without looking toward* CANETTO. *She draws a deep breath.*]
Ten days from now
In Trent upon the border of the north. . . .
I must remain a hostage until then.

CANETTO

Well said. . . .

UGOLINO

Oh, Fiamma. . . .

NUNCIO

Willingly?

FIAMMA

Not unwillingly, your Grace. . . .
You have my word. . . .
[*She turns, hearing the hymn which is now very clearly audible.*]
What song is that?
[*A soldier has entered carrying a very regal robe and another follows him bearing a crown of precious Byzantine workmanship—enamelled and jewelled.* WOMEN *come after—enough so that nine great tapers may be on the scene.*]

UGOLINO

[*Breathlessly—still close to* FIAMMA.
I shall be Emperor and set your will
Over the wills and words of all the earth,
Over the Swords and Spears of all the earth,
You bring *such* power to me.
[*She has listened proudly, giving no sign that she heard his words. Falteringly, he takes her arm.*]
See, Fiamma, see—my flight
Was swift as any hare's,

Yet I brought treasures.
I spill them at your feet.
See, Fiamma, see the spoils that I have fetched!
I cast them at your feet;
O, tread upon them.
They are nothing
Beneath your gaze that burns them into dust.
I know they are not worthy . . . nothing *is*.

[*He has led her toward the front of the scene directly in the centre. He takes the great robe from its coffer and the crown from him who holds it.*]

A robe—
A crown—
What else?
What *could* I bring you more than these?
I sacked Byzantium to win the crown.
I pillaged Rome to gain the robe.
Nothing—they're nothing—
What could I bring you more? . . .
And yet—oh, yet,
Fiamma, be pitiful
And let me give you them.
The world contains no rarer treasures.
I have emptied
The treasure houses of the world.
I know.

[*He hands the crown back to the* SOLDIER *and displays the robe with a kind of childish eagerness, hoping vainly for some sign of her pleasure.*]

Once on a time a King in Babylon
Ordained the weaving of this mantle,
Saying: "None is so beautiful as my queen.
She shall be clad sublimely."
Once on another time
A Queen in Samarkand

Deemed herself worthy of such splendor,
And all the Arabian East
Worshipped her, wearing it.
But afterwards men laid it by
Against the time when, once more, perfect
Beauty should walk the earth.
Fiamma, that time has come.
Alas!
How poor the robe enveloping your beauty!
Oh, yet, be pitiful and wear it! . . .

[*He wraps it about* FIAMMA'S *shoulders. She is like some incredible Ikon, like some pre-Giottesque Madonna, all gold, immovable. Maria re-enters above from her mistress' chamber.*]

AMINA

I have seen the shrine of a miraculous image.
It was less gorgeous than she.

MARIA

[*From the door above.*

She is like the Virgin!
She is like the Virgin Mary!

UGOLINO

Bring all your candles closer.
Here is a sacred thing.

[*He takes the crown.*

St. Helena, mother of Constantine,
Dreamed where the true cross lay
Hidden in Palestine,
And found the cross and found the nails and thorns—
And said:
"A fitting reliquary shall be made,
A Crown more precious
Than any that has ever been.

Fashion me one of gold and fine enamel
And emeralds and chrysoprase and pearls
And lapis-lazuli and malachite,
And weld a nail therein
And set a splinter of the cross
And set a thorn amidst its jewels,
For it shall be the crown to rule the world."
Your scorn the world, Fiamma,
I know.
I know.
O, yet be pitiful!

[*He sets the crown reverently upon the motionless head. The* WOMEN *with the candles have formed a half circle of which* FIAMMA *is the centre.*]

AMINA

She is like the altar of Corpus Christi
With all the candles burning.

A SOLDIER

Not all the shrines of Rome have so much gold.

MARIA

I have seen a picture of the Virgin Mary.
She was crowned Queen of Paradise by God.
You have her look, Madonna.

UGOLINO

I crown you—

[*He falls to his knees.*

So—
You shall be Queen beside me.
And we shall rise omnipotent, we two—
You—Fiamma—
Ah!
And Ugolino,
I!

[*He buries his face in the hem of her dress. Still she does not move. Her gaze seems frozen. All the lights shine upon her, but they are pale beside her. She is an image of the Virgin decked in votive offerings. She could work miracles.*]

[*But this feeble, gorgeous, worldly attempt to enshrine divinity has failed. The singing has grown so loud that* UGOLINO'S *words have been partly drowned by it. The* CAPTAIN *enters.*]

CAPTAIN

Madonna, he is come.

CANETTO

Who?

CAPTAIN

The hermit.

CANETTO

So. . . I remember now,
You told me of this hermit, Captain. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Still immovable, breaking her silence almost with an effort.*]

Lead him before me.

CANETTO

Not so fast, Madonna.

FIAMMA

Bring him before me.

UGOLINO

[*Lifting his head.*

I'll have no shavehead here.

[*He supports himself at* FIAMMA'S *feet, leaning upon his arm.*]

MARIA

Madonna. . . . oh,

Madonna Fiamma . . . no. . . .

[CANETTO *watches* FIAMMA *and* MARIA *closely.*

FIAMMA

Bring him to me.

[*But suddenly,* DAMIANO *is there. He enters quickly without being fetched, a stalwart figure in the robe of a Franciscan friar minor. His cowl is pulled far over his face. He moves with the swift swing of youthful energy. Seeing* FIAMMA, *he pauses. His eyes and* FIAMMA'S *meet across the crouching form of* UGOLINO.]

FIAMMA

Leave us together, all of you.

UGOLINO

[*Looks at* DAMIANO *feverishly and springs to his feet.*]

How came you here?

[DAMIANO *does not move.*

Answer me, priest . . . who are you?

CANETTO

[*Steps forward.*

The holy father enters as he pleases.
I would I might make sure. . . .

[*He speaks half to himself and goes toward* DAMIANO. *He lifts his hand as though to snatch back the cowl. He changes his mind.*]

[*He seems to radiate a great sudden joy and he is surely thinking deeply and quickly.*]

Come . . . leave Madonna here with her confessor.

[*His arm about* UGOLINO'S *shoulder, turns to* FIAMMA.]

We shall, in turn, obey your wish, and go
Regretfully, but with due reverence.

UGOLINO

[*Puzzled . . . looks at* CANETTO.

Why, no. . . .

CANETTO

Master. . . .

UGOLINO

No. . . . No. . . .

CANETTO

Master, be generous. . . .
My master?

[*His tone is curiously insinuating.*

UGOLINO

[*Bursting out.*

He? . . .

CANETTO

We must be quite certain. . . .

[UGOLINO, *pushed by* CANETTO, *goes.*

Go on before, good Captain. . . .

[*The* CAPTAIN *goes, making the sign of the cross, as he turns toward* DAMIANO.]

There's piety, your Grace. . . . I will attend you. . . .
Go—all of you! Lovely Amina. . . .
Only leave your candles
That the confession may not be too gloomy.

[AMINA *goes, same business as the* CAPTAIN, *and the* NUNCIO, *with an adoring look at* FIAMMA, *follows.*]

CANETTO

My good Maria, I have need of you.
War and religion
Should not bear one another company
Too long. . . . So forward, men! My good Maria. . . .

[*The soldiers have gone.* MARIA *goes across, her fear quite evident. She is ushered out by* CANETTO.]

Peace be upon your prayers. . . .

[*He goes.*

FIAMMA

[*She speaks as with a very great effort and she does not move.*]

Put back your cowl.

[DAMIANO *obeys. We see his face, of serious, quiet beauty, his hair dark and curly. A tight cap of mail rests upon his head.*]

FIAMMA

This is a strange disguise. . . .
This is a strange encounter. . . .

DAMIANO

The hermit hooded me.

FIAMMA

God will forgive the desecration. . . .

DAMIANO

I stared over the water at this place,
I lurked beneath your window in a boat.
I could not stare and lurk forever, so
The hermit hooded me, and so,
I entered . . .
You know why I have come?

FIAMMA

I know
That you are mad . . . to come so soon. . . .

DAMIANO

Our son . . .

[FIAMMA *nods.*

Stolen . . .

FIAMMA

Fiorenzo's here.

DAMIANO

Unhurt?

FIAMMA

Unhurt.

DAMIANO

Oh, when they told me!
Could I have waited longer?
I knew he would be here.
I knew that you would need me.
All that I have called me.
I answered.
You were not frightened when they brought him here?

FIAMMA

At first, a little. After I remembered
How you would surely come tonight.
Are you alone?

DAMIANO

Two score
Lie off the island in a boat against
The changing of the watch . . .

FIAMMA

As I had planned.

DAMIANO

Enough?

FIAMMA

There are but four and twenty men
To man the gates.

They will be routed by surprise
How strange this is . . .
Although I am afraid . . . oh, desperately . . .
I cannot fear, Damiano. . . .
I am with you here as always
In our house.

[*The robe slips from her shoulders. Her hands go to her brow and remove the crown. She drops it soundlessly upon the robe. She makes a little plaintive sound, steps nearer* DAMIANO *and suddenly falls softly to her knees before him.*]

[*His hands pressed tightly palm to palm, his lips move silently in prayer.*]

FIAMMA

My lord, my love, my guide, my master. . .
My husband and my brother before Christ. . .
My veriest child. . .

DAMIANO

My Fiamma. . .

[*The night sky is luminous with moonrise. The upper reaches of the tower are all blue.*]

[*He raises her to her feet and holds her at arms' length, his hands on her shoulders, his face close to hers.*]

My beloved,
There is great danger. . .

[*Far less calm than she, he releases her and looks nervously about.*]

FIAMMA

I have my love again!

DAMIANO

That was Canetto?

FIAMMA

Yes.

DAMIANO

He stole the child, I think.
What will he now devise?
Where is he now?

FIAMMA

The child is safe,
We two have been
So long apart.

DAMIANO

He would not give you up to me!

FIAMMA

Damiano. . . .

DAMIANO

Oh, Fiamma,
Queen of kings and angels. . .
My lady of the diadem of stars. . .

FIAMMA

Bend down your face upon me. . .

DAMIANO

Your eyes shine through the darkness with a light
Of very holy mercy. . .

[*The rising moon spreads a great patch of light over the back wall of the stage. It shines through the window.*]

FIAMMA

Give me your lips, Damiano.

DAMIANO

I am as one long years immersed in darkness,
For all the perfect answer to my prayer
I dare not look upon the sun. . .
How strange it is! I do not know myself. . .

FIAMMA

You tremble, my Damiano, and in me
Is only blessed peace. . .
Give me your lips. . .

[*They kiss.*

DAMIANO

What sound was that?

FIAMMA

No sound.

DAMIANO

I heard . . .

FIAMMA

Only the sea birds nesting the tower.

DAMIANO

But if one should
Come here upon us!

FIAMMA

Maria keeps good watch.
We are alone in a forgotten world.
Not even God is here.

[*The shadow of a head, shoulders and arms of a man appears upon the back wall, framed, as the man himself, in the frame of the tower window.*]

DAMIANO

The dew is fresh upon the April grasses,
My Fiamma, in my heart.

FIAMMA

And I am filled and flowing with new life. . . .

DAMIANO

This is incredible. We two, at last.
And in this prison. . . .

FIAMMA

'Tis a dream, perhaps. . . .
Damiano, I have dreamed . . .
A dreadful dream last night
Came down upon my slumber,
Came like a tapestry
Woven of sword thrusts,
Dyed in blood. . . . Came down,
Dark and interminable and enveloped me.
Oh, dreams of mine, ineffable, remote,
And bathed in bitter tears and crowned with thorns,
And strewn with ashes, life has answered you!

DAMIANO

Now in a little while
We two shall give the signal with a torch,
And then my men will come and we shall go,
You, and our son and I, out of this place
Into the garden of the day.
I know that we are watched. . . .

FIAMMA

What then, Damiano?
Danger gives life to love!
This the utmost moment of our lives.

DAMIANO

I heard . . .

FIAMMA

Only the sea birds nesting in the tower.
[*The shadow moves and vanishes.*
Come up and watch
How well Fiorenzo sleeps. . . .

DAMIANO

The moon has come and scattered all the mists
Of evening. . . .

FIAMMA

In my hair
They linger still.

DAMIANO

The moon has spun
Moon cobwebs in the wonder of your hair,
There hangs an opal aureole of light
Where the soft mesh of fog reflects the moon. . . .
[*They are on the stairs, embraced.*
The wind is in your hair. Ah, give it me,
Its glory is God's vision after death. . . .
Oh, let your hair breathe on me, Fiamma, so
I hold it to my lips. . . .
[*They go on up the stair.*

FIAMMA

Now all the woof of shadows vanishes. . . .
Now all the secrets of the silences,
Like a thick skein of sombre colored silks,
Limp i' the hand, are ours. Unravel them,
Weave them anew!

DAMIANO

Together,
Fiamma. . . .

FIAMMA

Oh, come.

DAMIANO

My own. . . .

FIAMMA

Fiorenzo sleeps. . . .

DAMIANO

[*As he speaks the door, left, swings open quite silently and very slowly.*]
Your body is like honey and like wine,
Your voice

Is like the echo when the starling sings,
Your breath
Is sweet as scent of clover fields
Blown down the summer wind to nothingness. . . .
Your hair, oh, Fiamma, let your hair fall down
On your slim bosom. On my lips, my soul
Begs for its softness.

[*The door is open now.*

FIAMMA

[*Stops him with a gesture and turns to the shrine where it glows beside her door.*]

Ave Maria gratia plena, . . . ora pro nobis.

[*She is interrupted by a scream from the outer darkness. It is the cry of a woman in mortal agony. It is repeated with choked, horrible words which we cannot understand, which we guess to be pleas for mercy.*]

[FIAMMA *and* DAMIANO *start apart in terror. The scream sounds nearer.*]

[MARIA *enters. Her scream is choked in her throat as she crosses the threshold, she falls on the floor. She moans hideously.*]

[*Neither* FIAMMA *nor* DAMIANO *makes a sound.*]

[*A very sickness of terror holds her clinging to the stair-rail*]

[*He comes very cautiously toward the moaning figure of* MARIA.]

CANETTO

[*Some chords of a lute off stage and he is heard singing merrily. The voice comes from a distance.*]

E lo mio cor s'inchina,
O, bella, vo dicando
Così . . . così. . . . Com'io mi sento

E di dolor penando,
E vi . . . e vi . . . e vivo in gran tormento.

DAMIANO

[*Bending over the prostrate woman, he speaks through the song.*]
Maria! My good Maria!
What have they done to you?

[*He lifts her head.*

[FIAMMA *runs to him, but the sight of* MARIA'S *face halts her.*]

DAMIANO

Her tongue! . . .
Torn out at the roots!

FIAMMA

[*Her cry of horror breaks into the singing.*
The butchers!

DAMIANO

Canetto!
Our messenger. . .
She will not speak again.
Such a jest
As hatches in that evil mind . . .
They know me . . . who I am.

FIAMMA

Oh, now the thing begins. Canetto sings.
He sings to us, Damiano!
Canetto is a juggler. . . .
We are the balls he tosses in the air. . . .
He tosses us and holds us in his hands!

[*The curtain falls upon their terror.*

THE THIRD ACT

The curtain rises again as soon as may be. The scene and situation are unchanged. The action has not been interrupted.

CANETTO

[*Still singing in the distance.*

Oimè ch'io moroe amando!
Oimè . . . oimè . . . oimè la donna mia!
Oimè la vita mia!
Pr'amo vo sospirando
Per ti . . . per ti . . . per ti, o vita mia,
Aimè . . . aimè . . . aimè! E mors querando.

DAMIANO

We shall have need
Of all our wits.

FIAMMA

This is to make folk laugh. . . .
Fool! Fool that I am!

DAMIANO

This thing lies between him and God.

FIAMMA

Between
Canetto and *his* god?

DAMIANO

They tortured her. What did she tell?
What did she tell them?

CANETTO

[*Still singing in the distance.*

Più ch'a donna che sia
A ti . . . a ti . . . a ti . . . mi raccomando
Oimè lasso, pensando;
E di . . . e di . . e dico, o perla mia,
E lo mio cor s'inchina.

[MARIA *lifts her head and tries to speak. She can only make a choked and inarticulate sound.*]

FIAMMA

[*She stops* MARIA *with a gesture of horror.*

Someone is coming. . . . Cover your head.

[DAMIANO *quickly pulls the cowl over his head.*

[*The* CAPTAIN *enters.*

FIAMMA

Oh, Captain, see. . . .

CAPTAIN

She told
Nothing.

FIAMMA

My brave Maria.

CAPTAIN

It was her silence angered them.
I greatly fear for you, Messire Damiano.

FIAMMA

You know?

CAPTAIN

I guessed.

FIAMMA

And yet admitted him?

CAPTAIN

To you, Madonna.

DAMIANO

We must move hastily.

CAPTAIN

Which way?

DAMIANO

There is the window,
We have a ladder.

CAPTAIN

They have their crossbows and the moon is full.

FIAMMA

Canetto knew
What power Fiorenzo had.

DAMIANO

The child was certain bait.

FIAMMA

Three rats! The trap is full!

CAPTAIN

I am the Captain here,
I still control who comes and goes.

FIAMMA

What do you mean?

CAPTAIN

To save you from disaster,
Madonna Fiamma,
I would betray this garrison.
My Lord, I understand
How few things are important in this life,
How there may be but one.

FIAMMA

And that one?

CAPTAIN

Justice.

FIAMMA

Oh, yes.

CAPTAIN

You have concealed
In boats beneath the rocks
Two score of soldiers, sir.

DAMIANO

Canetto knows?

CAPTAIN

I cannot say. *I* know. . . .
So hide, Messire Damiano.

FIAMMA

My chamber.

CAPTAIN

Better not. Their thoughts
Race to your chamber. Ugolino grows
Amorous in his wine.

FIAMMA

[*Her hands cover her eyes.*

Ah!

CAPTAIN

[*He has opened the trap which* CANETTO *inspected in the opening scene.*]

Go down, Damiano.

DAMIANO

And leave you, Fiamma?

CAPTAIN

Trust me.
Who trusts no man is lost indeed.

DAMIANO

I shall be trapped.

FIAMMA

The trap is sprung already.

CAPTAIN

Go down, Messire Damiano.

DAMIANO

I had rather
Fight in the open.

FIAMMA

Think . . . Fiorenzo lies
Completely at their mercy.

CAPTAIN

Only this
Between your deaths and you. . . .
That I command the gates.

DAMIANO

You swear to open them?

CAPTAIN

If need come . . . yes. . . .

DAMIANO

In God's sight, then, whose eyes
Cannot be blinded.

[DAMIANO *goes down into the place beneath. The* CAPTAIN *closes the door above his head.*]

FIAMMA

Now I commend myself to God and you.

CAPTAIN

His safety lies in your two hands.

FIAMMA

I know tonight cannot miscarry,
Tomorrow were too dreadful otherwise.

CAPTAIN

Be gentle, brave and wise,
And 'ware Canetto. . . .
Where shall I take the woman?

FIAMMA

Is she much hurt?

CAPTAIN

Not mortally.

FIAMMA

Poor woman! Captain, such fidelity
Is something more than ordinary.

CAPTAIN

Oh, rare is all fidelity. . . .
Madonna, aiding you,
I must be faithless to my oath.
My fealty that men would call my honor. . . .
Serving injustice, would God call it so?

FIAMMA

Fidelity
Cannot be base nor to base ends perverted.

CAPTAIN

Ah. . . .

FIAMMA

My state is pitiable. Do what you may
For me and for my lord and for my child.

CAPTAIN

Great soul. Forever more I swear. . . .

[*But* CANETTO *enters suddenly bearing his lute.*

CANETTO

You must not whisper, Captain. Whispers strike
The spark upon the tinder of suspicion.
Besides . . .
I find it difficult to overhear you.

FIAMMA

[*Pointing to* MARIA.

Messire Canetto,
This is a hellish thing that you have done.

CANETTO

Madonna Fiamma,
This is a thing too hideous for hell.

FIAMMA

[*To the Captain.*

Take her away.

CANETTO

Go, help her to the woman's lodgings.
Send the leech to her
That she may learn to speak without a tongue.

FIAMMA

Oh, can you walk, Maria?

CAPTAIN

Well enough
If I support her.

[*He helps her to her feet. Her moans have ceased.*
[MARIA *looks once and terribly at* CANETTO.
[CANETTO *shudders in spite of himself. The* CAPTAIN *and* MARIA *go.*]

FIAMMA

I heard you singing now, Messire Canetto,
Upon the heels of this.

CANETTO

[*He hums mockingly.*

"E lo mio cor s'inchina . . ."
Madonna . . .
While duty robbed me of the sight of you,
Which was a deep misfortune to my eyes,
I thought to give you sound of me, and took
Such comfort in my madrigal.

FIAMMA

The crow caws horrid requiems.

CANETTO

Look in my eyes.
What glint of infamy do you discover?
My nails shall pluck it out.

FIAMMA

I am not in the jesting vein.

CANETTO

[*But he is gay enough for both.*

If rain falls from the thunders of the skies
Upon two men alike, two men are wet.
But only one of them may dry himself
Beside the fire.

FIAMMA

Both. . . .

CANETTO

Alas,
We are not Moslems when the fire is love.

FIAMMA

Oh, villain!

CANETTO

Is the metaphor
Too allegorical?

FIAMMA

Vile, oh, vile!

CANETTO

The trap must work
Two ways at once.
My master gains
His vengeance. I appropriate his love.
Is not the division fair enough?
Where have you hidden him?

[*He looks about.*

FIAMMA

Whom do you think I hide?

CANETTO

The man of God.

FIAMMA

Gone!
I had almost forgotten him in this.
I cannot much regret
He did not stay to share it with me.

CANETTO

He did not stay?

FIAMMA

You see he did not.

CANETTO

And now, beyond a doubt, he tells his beads
Peaceably in his chapel?

FIAMMA

It may be so.

CANETTO

The age of miracles goes on and on.
How did he leave?

FIAMMA

How?

CANETTO

By the window?

FIAMMA

That way is guarded. Ask the sentinel.

CANETTO

So opportune in his arrival . . .
So early gone.

FIAMMA

I am not slow at my devotions.

CANETTO

Who has no fear of hell has little need
Of prayer, Madonna . . . that I concede.
Only one trifle puzzles me.
I have not seen a monk before, who wore
A shirt of mail.

FIAMMA

Are you surprised?
It seems a prudent garment.

CANETTO

Against swords, perhaps.
Against suspicion, most imprudent. But——
My preference impels me to believe
Your words . . . although I know there is no truth
In them.

FIAMMA

I do not ask that you believe my words.

CANETTO

It suits me for the moment.

FIAMMA

Search as you will.

CANETTO

No, I'll rather close
This door and speak with you a while
In privacy.

FIAMMA

You have much jarred my gaiety.

CANETTO

Unfortunate! My own
Is at the fever pitch.

[*He goes to close the door.*

FIAMMA

Leave me.

CANETTO

There's a feast, tonight.
My lord calls it his wedding feast.
Your eyes are wary, Fiamma.
Should you laugh
Were I to woo you?

FIAMMA

Are you so disposed?

CANETTO

Love is an element
In all our dispositions. Am I rash?

FIAMMA

Since you risk nothing, only base.

CANETTO

I should not hope to win your friendship, yet,
You have a scorn but little less than friendly. . . .

A curse from you were cousin to a blessing.
I told you, you remember,
I found in you my first antagonist?
I am a judge, Madonna.

FIAMMA

I find your words discourteous.

CANETTO

Alas!

FIAMMA

You find my scorn is something less than friendly,
I find your thoughts much less than loyal, if,
I have culled their flower.

CANETTO

You find the flower. . .
Fragrant?

FIAMMA

No.

CANETTO

Why, then. . . .
Endow it with a perfume. . . .

FIAMMA

I?

CANETTO

Who else?
Lady, I love you, too.

FIAMMA

Even as I said . . .
Your loyalty
Might well be questioned. . . .

CANETTO

My loyalty to whom?

FIAMMA

Your master.

CANETTO

I am not slow to change
A master for a mistress. . .
I offer you the choice
Between that German swine I serve, and me,
Who am, I think, the more presentable. . .
Considered as a lover.
There is a bond between us two.

FIAMMA

What bond?

CANETTO

Our love of beauty.

FIAMMA

Hah!

CANETTO

Or good or evil
Beauty is beauty still.
Beauty with me or corn husks with a swine. . . .
Say . . . do you know remorse?
Delicately considered, it becomes
A kind of revelling in wrong. I know
What I shall do. Now, through remorse,
I glory in the doing.
My pulses pound the harder. Love is made,
Somehow, more resonant by this remorse
Of mine, this honest consciousness of what
I do for you against my loyalty.
All my life is here!
Since you will make no choice
Between my lord and me,
I fling my loyalty at your feet,
Trample its flimsy texture,

Vault the gulf between us, take you for myself
And laugh at him!

FIAMMA

I'll call your master here.

CANETTO

How if *I* call him?

FIAMMA

You will not dare. . .

CANETTO

Not dare, and this to gain?

FIAMMA

I am still Fiamma. . .

CANETTO

Ay, that's true. . . .
See, now . . . I close the door. My master sits
Over his wine . . . I come
Closer to you . . . I lay
My hand upon your dress. . . . A little wrench. . . .
Only a little wrench. . .

[*He has suited action to word and stands, now, his hand gripping the bosom of Fiamma's dress.*]

FIAMMA

[*In a hard voice.*

Put down your hand.

CANETTO

I cannot.

FIAMMA

Put down your hand!

CANETTO

Strike it away.

FIAMMA

[*A futile movement. Her hand falls.*

Ah! . . .

Photo by Abbé

"BEAUTY WITH ME OR CORNHUSKS WITH A SWINE."
Clare Eames and José Ruben

CANETTO

Madonna Fiamma. . . I alone
Of all who cross your path am strong enough
To disregard your will.
You dare not cry aloud for help,
Because, to cry were to betray Damiano.
You laugh?

FIAMMA

I do not laugh.

CANETTO

A little danger, like a little wine,
Resolves our passions to consuming heat,
Our blood to molten metal.

FIAMMA

Oh, my God,
Resolve my indeterminate heart for me!

CANETTO

Refuge in prayer? Why, then, the trick is turned!
The molten metal's poured upon the wood.
It chars. . . an instant more and it will burst
To devastating flame. Call on Damiano
And let me kill him here and kiss away
The dying breath of him from off your lips,
And kiss the snarl of terror from your lips. . .

FIAMMA

Talk and talk and talk. . . hold off. . .

CANETTO

Sea gull!

FIAMMA

Back!

CANETTO

Fox. . .

FIAMMA

Wild beast. . .

CANETTO

That's it! Wild beast!
I am Reynard come to mate
With you beneath the moon. . .
I bark. . . . I howl. . .

FIAMMA

Now tell me you are mad. . .
Tell me that you are mad, or, by the saints,
I'll tear your soul out of your stinking throat.

CANETTO

[*Breaks out into convulsive laughter.*
Tear, Fiamma, tear, and see
How my soul mirrors you in all your beauty. . . .

FIAMMA

Kneel down. . . .

CANETTO

My queen. . . .

FIAMMA

Kneel down
And swear you did not speak to me. . . . Oh, foul. . . .

CANETTO

[*He kneels.*
Foul though I be, I woo you. . . and, in time,
Shall win you to my wooing. This I knew
From my first glimpse of you . . .

FIAMMA

Befouled. . .
Befouled am I in this. . .
You jackal of the night. . .
You snake. . . . you wolf. . . .

CANETTO

You saint. . . . you goddess. . . .

FIAMMA

[*Retreating from him she has come against the table. With a swift gesture she whips Ugolino's sword out of its scabbard and presses its point against* CANETTO'S *throat.*]

Silence!

CANETTO

[*Still choked with laughter, on his knees, his hand catches her skirt to his lips.*]

Magnificent! Now, press. . . ever so lightly. . .
A single blow and your worst enemy
And hottest suitor dies. Oh, now again
A thrill runs through your flesh as when I touched
Your bosom lately. Oh, believe me, Fiamma,
Such loathing is the closest kin to passion.
Is, of itself, desire.

[*She tries to draw back. His upturned face seems to hold her almost hypnotically.*]

I see my lord
Who kneels by your inviolable bed,
Pleading, and is rejected,
And turns away and dares not touch your hand,
For utmost fear of you. . . .
I dare. Oh, Fiamma, do you see? I dare.

[*His hand has crept up the blade and fastens upon hers where she grips the hilt.. The sword falters.*]

Heroes are in your heart awaiting him
Who shall be fit to father heroes. You
No longer speak with men, but hold, at evening,
Your solitude's communion with the bells.

[FIAMMA *reels.* CANETTO *begins to rise.*

For all and always, I,

Madonna Fiamma, I have broken you. . .
In all the world I am your single peer.
[*On his feet, facing her.*
I have decided, Fiamma, presently
We shall go out together, to some hill,
Where distant lutes are clear and night birds sing. . . .
I know this, Fiamma, nor will you gainsay
My will in any wise. This love of mine
Born in betrayal of my master's trust,
Envenomed by remorse,
In its incredible ascendency,
Is invincible.
[*The sword falls clanking to the floor. Her hands are limp.*]
[FIAMMA *catches her breath in a great sob.*
Said I not so? Oh, now. . . oh, now, your flesh
Is flame, your blood is molten gold, your bones
Are nothing. . . .
[*His hands mould her as though she were clay.*

FIAMMA

[*Almost fainting.*
Canetto!

CANETTO

Now have you learned. . . . There is
Nothing, Madonna, so invincible
As evil.

FIAMMA

Ah! . . .

CANETTO

It is the revelry
Of life eternally triumphant, ah—
It is the hunger of eternity.
[*He sinks at her feet and his lips devour her hand. She seems completely bereft of strength.*]
[UGOLINO *bursts in.*

UGOLINO

Fiamma!

[*Without materially changing his position,* CANETTO *stiffens.*

[FIAMMA'S *head falls back. She is revived.*

UGOLINO

Madonna Fiamma!

FIAMMA

My lord . . . I welcome you . . .

CANETTO

On bended knee, Madonna,
I thank you. . .

UGOLINO

[*Evidently he is a little drunk.*

I left a priest here.
Where has he gone?

CANETTO

He has vanished
Like a coin flipped in the sea.

[*He rises, his poise restored.*

UGOLINO

[*To* FIAMMA, *angrily.*

You've hidden him. . .

[*To* CANETTO

Her chamber?

CANETTO

[*His eyes and* FIAMMA'S *meet.*

No. . . I searched.

UGOLINO

Beneath here, then?

CANETTO

I had not thought of that.

UGOLINO

I'll look for him.
Where is my sword?
[*The sword is still lying at* FIAMMA'S *feet.* UGOLINO *sees it.*]
Why does my sword lie there?
You have been playing with my sword.

CANETTO

Was it play?
I scarcely know.
Give me the weapon, Master. Let me search.
[*He looks again at* FIAMMA *as he opens the trap.*
Have I your leave, Madonna?

FIAMMA

You will find. . . nothing. . .

CANETTO

[*Mockingly.*
I will find—nothing. . .
[*He goes down, the naked sword in his hand.*

UGOLINO

[*To* FIAMMA.
Where are your lips?
Where is their blood? The texture of your cheeks
Is changed to whiteness like the foam.

FIAMMA

The foam
Of waters churned and beaten against the rocks. . .

UGOLINO

Swear you have not seen
Damiano in this place?
I love you so. Do not betray my love.

FIAMMA

My lord. . . .

UGOLINO

Not to my enemy.

FIAMMA

Release me.

UGOLINO

No . . . No . . . and no! This monk
Was not his messenger? Swear, Fiamma!

FIAMMA

I swear that.

[UGOLINO *makes to go toward the opening of the trap.*]

You heard . . .
The answer I returned his Holiness?

UGOLINO

Oh, Fiamma!

FIAMMA

Still you doubt me. . . .

UGOLINO

No.

FIAMMA

You do.

UGOLINO

I know that I am mad. You madden me. . . .
If he were here. . . if he were here. . . ah, God!

FIAMMA

What empty words!

UGOLINO

You ghoul . . . you saint . . .
Or he . . . or I?
Fiamma, where is he?

FIAMMA

Who?

UGOLINO

Damiano!
Damiano!

FIAMMA

Do I know?

UGOLINO

Damnation!
You lie to me . . . you lie . . .

FIAMMA

I swear. . . .

UGOLINO

No . . . No. . . .
You lie to me. . . .

[*With his clenched fists he threatens her. She stands unmoved.*]

CANETTO

She does not lie, Master.

[*He emerges at this moment.*

I have found no one.

UGOLINO

[*Breaking again.*

Oh, forgive me, Fiamma.

[*His head falls. He brushes his hand across his brow as though to clear his mind. He moves listlessly away. Presently he sees the arras behind which he and* CANETTO *hid in the opening scene.*

His suspicion aroused, he looks behind it. He goes searching about.]

CANETTO

Madonna, see . . .
The blade is clean . . .
There is no blood upon it . . .

[FIAMMA *bends quickly over the trap. She seems to make some sign to* DAMIANO. CANETTO *stops her.*

Leave him in hiding, Fiamma.
The moment for your rescue has not come.

[*He closes the trap.*

FIAMMA

Silence.

CANETTO

Cannot you thank me?

FIAMMA

Thinking on all that hangs, between us, sir,
I cannot find it in my heart to thank you.

CANETTO

It is enough for me to realize
Some little obligation on your part.

UGOLINO

[*Drunken murmurings as he searches.*

Where has he gone?

FIAMMA

Is that your Christian purpose?
Look to your master.

UGOLINO

Behind the arras? Shavecrown, come out.

CANETTO

Is it not terrible to drink
As Germans do?

UGOLINO

[*Comes down from the back where he has been pulling the arras about. He tears open his doublet, so that his throat is bared.*]

The wine befogs my sight. I cannot see
My bride.

[*He paws his throat.*

Oof! I am better, so.
Bring in the feast. Invite
The Captain of the Garrison.
Music!

[*He stares questioningly at* CANETTO.

Well? Well?

CANETTO

Presently, presently, my good master.

UGOLINO

What were we looking for?

CANETTO

Eh, Master?

UGOLINO

Was there not a priest about?

CANETTO

He's gone.

UGOLINO

Fetch me another one.
What's a wedding without a priest?

CANETTO

Good master!

UGOLINO

Why not, why not?
Now I'll have wine and lights and lights and wine. . . .
Call out, Canetto! Bid them come to serve
My bride and me! Music!

[*Off stage the sound of a lute tuning and almost at once the music begins. A lute and a viola. And* AMINA *enters with dishes. Other servants follow.* CANETTO *superintends the laying of the table, always with an eye upon his master. Torches are brought and set in brackets.*]

CANETTO

Master, your dress.

UGOLINO

Let be.
It's better so. The room is warm.

[*He is leading* FIAMMA *to her place.*

Tonight
Is my last night in Italy. To horse
Tomorrow, and the windy road and swords,
Maybe, Madonna, but tonight
Is only Italy.

[*A gesture from* FIAMMA *halts him.*

I know, yet, in the end of judgment, grant
That to my life a single beauty came
With love of you.

[*He breaks down on the verge of drunken tears.*

FIAMMA

I pity you. . .
I pardon you. . . .

UGOLINO

Pity me? Pardon me? Oh, saints of heaven!
Here's a woman's pride.

FIAMMA

No, Ugolino. . .

UGOLINO

[*The bully in full swing.*

Madonna Fiamma, I no longer fear you.
Wine gives me courage.
Throw back your head, and laugh. . .
Laugh merrily!
Where's your robe?
Where's your crown?

[*One of the servants makes to bring them to her from the corner where they have lain all this time. She waves him off, and* CANETTO *motions him to take them away.*]

CANETTO

[*Fills a glass with wine, lifts it, sardonically exultant.*]

Le vin est bon et bel et blanc,
Fort et fer et fin et franc,
Freit et fres et fourmijant!

UGOLINO

That song is French!

CANETTO

Burgundian. . . . Three B's and seven F's,
They say in France, make wine
Worth drinking. Shall I do a trick
For you, my Master?

UGOLINO

Look on him, Fiamma, look,
Is he not wise and merry?
When I am Emperor of Germany
I'll name Canetto Chancellor. . . .

CANETTO

Oh, Master. . .

[*He bows and goes up the stairs to* FIAMMA'S *room.*

UGOLINO

Fiamma, pour wine for me!
Pour wine for me. . . no, you. . . you are my bride.
I'll have you serve me. . . .

FIAMMA

To your shame,
Ser Ugolino, to your sin and shame.

UGOLINO

[*Sweeping gesture, drunken and imperious, as he sits beside the woman.*]
All of you turn
Your faces to the wall. . . .
I love you, Fiamma, I must tell you so. . .
I shall lie by you in your tomb, at least,
If not in life.

FIAMMA

If you can face my hatred down.

UGOLINO

Or love or hate,
Tonight is mine. . . tomorrow shall be mine
And ever after to the well of death. . .
Now, bring the dishes in.

[*The* CAPTAIN *enters and sees the situation. He comes toward the table and lays his hand on his sword involuntarily. At the same moment,* CANETTO, *who has run up the stairs to* FIAMMA'S *chamber, reappears with* FIORENZO, *frightened, upon his shoulders. The* CAPTAIN, *seeing him, halts.*]

FIORENZO

Mother!

FIAMMA

[*She turns and sees him. Furiously, first to* UGOLINO, *then to* CANETTO.]

Madman, oh, madman, do you think to teach
Me fear of you in this wise? I will play
At any game with you
Knowing I cannot lose
Where all is lost already and long since. . .

[FIORENZO *hides his face in* FIAMMA'S *dress.*

UGOLINO

Long live my bride who learns last to fear
Her master. My good Captain,
You are come tardily. . .
Be welcome, none the less. . . Cry out
"Long live the bride of Ugolino!"

CAPTAIN

[*He takes his place at table.*

Oh, long live Madonna Fiamma!

CANETTO

I cry it, also. . .
Madonna Fiamma!

UGOLINO

Empress of Germany, tomorrow, Fiamma!

[FIAMMA *sits at the table facing the audience. Her face is framed by the glimmering tapers. She remains silent and motionless. Gradually her gaze becomes more and more intense and her face lights with a great ecstasy.*]

[*In the meantime the feast is under way. The*

music continues, the stew and wine are served. Soldiers stand about with torches.]

UGOLINO

Canetto, she's gloomy. . .

CANETTO

Gloomy or gay, she's beautiful.

UGOLINO

Rejoice with me. . . Fiamma, rejoice. . .
Oh, do you think she hates me so?

CANETTO

I think she loves you, sir, the best of us.

UGOLINO

What song was that, Canetto?

CANETTO

Le vin est bon et bel et blanc . . .
Freit et fer et fourmijant. . . .

UGOLINO

Captain, you're not drinking!
Abstinence at this board only confuses. . .

CAPTAIN

Confuse confusion, then, and drink to Bacchus!
[*Lifts his glass.*
Bacchus!

UGOLINO

Bacchus, the god of wine!
Women and bottles. . .
All womankind in a bottle. . .
I have my bottle. . . I shall have my woman
And stuff her in. . .

CANETTO

Master!

UGOLINO

But I *shall* stuff her in undoubtedly.

CANETTO

What's woman in a bottle?

UGOLINO

You've never loved a woman. . .

CANETTO

[*His eyes burning on* FIAMMA.

Have I not?

FIAMMA

[*Her eyes shining.*

God. . . oh, God!

UGOLINO

Who speaks of God?
Blasphemy!

CAPTAIN

Better bring God to filth than filth to God. . . .

UGOLINO

Who speaks of filth?

FIAMMA

Oh, see!
A vision comes upon my eyes. . . a gate
Shining above the inevitable sea,
That is the floor of heaven,
That is the wilderness of earth. . .
I have seen the heavens,
The everlasting heavens,
I have looked into the radiant hostelry
Where sits the Lord upon his burnished throne.
His shoulders are so broad. . .

UGOLINO

Give me your throat to kiss.

FIAMMA

His eyes look kindly at me and he speaks
Saying, "Whatever men may be
I am the truth,
I am belief,
I am love. . .
I am perfect justice,
I am the perfection of knowledge."
Wherefore I know that I
Must have no terror more.

CANETTO

Here's a sophisticated world. . .

CAPTAIN

Great soul!

FIAMMA

I was weak in body and He carried me,
Faint hearted and He comforted my heart,
I languished and He spurred me,
Sinful I was, and He admonished me,
Weak and He taught me strength. . .

UGOLINO

I'm drunk.

FIAMMA

. . . Wherefore I know!

UGOLINO

Ration the wine broadcast amongst the soldiers.

CANETTO

No wine tonight for them.

FIAMMA

I am the steel upon the anvil,
The dreadful hour will temper me and prove me
And gain me pardon in the tremendous eyes
Of God.

CAPTAIN

Great soul. . . great soul!

UGOLINO

Wine, I say, to the garrison.

CANETTO

You're mad to say it.

UGOLINO

How? Will you cross me?

CANETTO

Madonna speaks a sermon. . .

UGOLINO

I want no sermons at my wedding feast!

FIAMMA

For that I sought to question and protest,
My vision was of wisdom, not of fate. . .

CANETTO

[*Speaking at the same time.*

Sermons and Aristotle!

UGOLINO

What's Aristotle?
Is it wine?

CANETTO

Oh, no. Philosophy.

FIAMMA

But many weaponed fate rules us no less,
For all our wisdom, and we go, at last,
Down to defeat, at fate's decree, and there,
From knowing God, find truth, upon
The uttermost foundation stones and learn
The honesty and beauty of our souls.
What does it matter how the world is lost?

UGOLINO

I had a wench before was given to visions. . .

FIAMMA

[*From far above them.*

What does it matter how the world is lost?
We four are here assembled at a feast
Of life. This wine, this meat, these breads, these fruits
Are things inanimate, transmuted here
By the stupendous tension of this hour. . .
These are our very souls we eat and drink. . .
What does it matter how the world is lost?

CANETTO

[*A hoarse echo.*

What does it matter how the world is lost?

FIAMMA

I looked upon the face of God. . . I know!

UGOLINO

You fill your heart with gloom.

FIAMMA

Not gloom, but exaltation!

UGOLINO

I'll take my way with you!

FIAMMA

Let be what may. . . Beneath the eyes of God. . .

CAPTAIN

Oh, hideous!

FIAMMA

I am a ravenous beast. . .
I glut myself with life. . .
Devouring. . .

CANETTO

[*Wildly.*

Burning. . .

FIAMMA

All.

CANETTO

[*Triumphant.*

I understand. . .
I understand. . .
This is the glory of the perilous. . .
This is the lust of hazard. . .

FIAMMA

I have not known such joy in all my days,
For I am desperate, at last, and pit
My will against your lust, my mind against
Your treachery. . .

UGOLINO

Amen to that!

FIAMMA

Should I tell you how
This caitiff, here, this true Canetto, whom
You trust, bargained with me for your betrayal. . .

UGOLINO

Hah!

FIAMMA

What would you say?

UGOLINO

You lie.

CANETTO

Oh, no. . . she does not wholly lie.

UGOLINO

Not lie, you dog?

FIAMMA

Would you not, for that crime, chastise him?

CANETTO

Would you not?

UGOLINO

If it were true. . .

FIAMMA

[*Even higher exaltation.*

I speak the truth. . .
And with that very sword of yours I held
Canetto from me. . .

UGOLINO

What does she say?

CANETTO

It is the truth without a doubt, my lord.

UGOLINO

Canetto, will you not deny. . . ?

CANETTO

Oh, no. . .

UGOLINO

With my bare hands
I'll tear your plotting head from off your shoulders.

CANETTO

She is a goad; she lashes me to frenzy. . .
Her words are sleet upon my cringing flesh,
Salt in my wounds. . .

UGOLINO

I see a sudden pitfall. . .

[FIAMMA *and the* CAPTAIN *watch this quarrel eagerly.*]

CANETTO

Against your might I am defenseless. Kill
Me if you will, you know
What I am worth to you.

UGOLINO

I set my heel upon your worth,
Give me my sword. . .

CANETTO

Cannot you take it up,
Master and executioner?

UGOLINO

[*He lifts it up clumsily from the table.*

Can I not?

CANETTO

[*Spitting the words in* UGOLINO'S *face; his master-stroke of blasphemy.*]

May God receive my soul!

UGOLINO

[*He lets the sword fall.*

Brother! My Oliver!
My closest councillor!
Why? Why?

CANETTO

[*Turns from* UGOLINO—*Latin disgust at Teuton sentimentality.*]

You ask?

UGOLINO

Not I! I do not ask!

CANETTO

Jealousy had been valuable to her. . .
Had we two quarreled. . .

UGOLINO

[*Too drunk to understand.*

Had we two quarreled?

[*Suddenly he does understand.*

Oh!

[*He turns from* CANETTO *to* FIAMMA. *She laughs triumphantly.*]

You thirsty, scheming woman, you. . .
Look into my eyes. . .
Where is your courage gone?

[*His left hand darts out and grips her shoulder. He forces her to her knees.*]

Howl!
Howl!
You crow. . . you crow. . .
I'd give you to Canetto, do you hear?
I'd give you to the soldiers,
But that I love you so. . . wherefore. . .
I kill you, Fiamma. . .

[*He lifts the sword which his right hand has gripped all the while, and is about to strike* FIAMMA.]

CANETTO

[*With a hoarse cry springs from his chair at* UGOLINO'S *throat.*]

No! ! !

[*The sudden assault carries* UGOLINO *clear of* FIAMMA *and the sword flies out of his hand.*]

[FIAMMA *stands back from the struggling men beside the foot of the stair where the torches of pitch pine shed their full light upon her.* FIORENZO *goes to her.*]

CANETTO

[*Breaks free from* UGOLINO.

There is another guest . . .
Unbidden to the feast.
Do not kill the woman, Master.
I have a better victim!
Fiamma, shall I call up Damiano, now?

CAPTAIN

Yes!

FIAMMA

Damiano! Damiano!

CAPTAIN

The signal with the torch, Madonna Fiamma!
Damiano's men!

CANETTO

[*He makes for the trap and opens it.*

Come up, Damiano. . .

UGOLINO

[*Too blind with fury to observe, he flings himself bellowing on* CANETTO.]

You!

[*They overturn the table in their struggle.*

[*Clad now in shining mail, his naked sword in his hand,* DAMIANO *comes up out of the trap.*]

[*The servants flee, screaming.*

DAMIANO

You, Captain, to your gates. . . The signal, Fiamma!

[*The soldiers attack him. He kills one but the other with a chair drives him back against the stair.*]

FIAMMA

[*A great cry.*

Ah!

[*She snatches a blazing torch from a soldier.*

[DAMIANO, *driven back, swings his sword in flashing circles to defend the stair.*]

CANETTO

[*Wriggling free from* UGOLINO.

The monk in mail!

UGOLINO

[*Pulls himself to his feet.*

Fiamma! Where is my sword?

DAMIANO

The attack, Fiamma, signal the attack!

CANETTO

Signal your doom!

FIAMMA

[*She goes up the stair.*

Soldiers of Damiano!
Soldiers of Christ!
Soldiers of Mary Queen!
Soldiers of God!
Hear me!
I am Fiamma!

[*She stands with* FIORENZO *at the window of the gallery. A great shout greets her from the sea. The radiance of the torch shining upon her, she is a figure of colossal stature.*]

This is the flame of my hour!
This is the flame of my need!
This is the flame of my summons!
Men of Damiano hiding on the sea
To the attack!
I, Fiamma, cry it to the desperate night!
A rescue. . .
A rescue. . .

DAMIANO

A rescue!
A rescue!

[UGOLINO *crashes drunkenly amidst the débris of the table.*]

CANETTO

[*Rushes out, crying:*

I shall come back for you, Damiano.
The gates! The gates!

[*The tumult of the attack begins. Her clear voice dominates it.*]

UGOLINO

Preserve us, God, this is the escalade. . .

CANETTO

[*Outside.*

The Emperor! The Emperor!

[*The alarm bell sounds, trumpets blare.*

FIAMMA

Oh, flame! Oh, flame! Oh, flame!
Beacon upon the sea,
Laughing,
I hold you high against the firmament,
Laughing,
I throw your splendor far upon the waters,
Laughing, I lift you to my battle shout!

[*The tumult of the attack is at its height. The doors of the castle are crushed by great blows.*]

Flame, flame, oh, flame!
Burn them!
Destroy them!
Stifle them!
You are the breath of the Lord!
You are the blood of the Savior!
You are the crown of the Mother!

[*To and fro, across the stage, the fight swirls and eddies beneath* FIAMMA. *Now they are on the stair, now in the doorway.* DAMIANO'S *men,* DAMIANO *himself, the soldiers of the garrison,* ÇANETTO *—a mad blaze of sword blades.*]

Glory of stars! Glory of suns and suns!
I burn my life out, glowing in this torch!
I hurl my life away. . . I shout! I sing!
I am triumphant!
I loose destruction on this place! I leap
Winged across the sea upon your light!
I am the angel of the flaming sword!
I am Fiamma!
I am Fiamma!
I am Fiamma!
I am the cause!
I am the right!
I am the woman!
Excalibur, born of my strength,
Scatter their souls upon the windy sea,
Scorch them to cinders in the furnaces
Of Hell. . . Be vengeance to me! Oh, be vengeance!
Be splendor, oh, be splendor!
Excalibur. . . Excalibur. . .
Kindle them!
Inspire them!
Create them!

Enswathe them!
Lend them your terror!
Lend them your light!
Lend them your beauty!
Out, flame, I fling you, blazing, to your prey,
Out to the sea. . .
Into the night. . .
Against the stars!

[*She flings the torch forth. The curtain falls.*

THE FOURTH ACT

The curtain rises again as soon as may be. The scene and situation are unchanged. The action has not been interrupted.

FIAMMA *is seen dimly against the window. She holds her breath and watches.* FIORENZO *is beside her. The turmoil of the escalade continues.*

Two of DAMIANO'S *soldiers break in through the door. They attack* CANETTO *who kills one of them. The other blocks the stair.*

UGOLINO

[*Struggling to his feet.*

Crossbows! Where are your crossbows?

CANETTO

The Emperor! The Emperor!

SOLDIER

[DAMIANO'S *man, fighting* CANETTO.

Master, make for the window! Leap for the boats!

DAMIANO

What has happened?

SOLDIER

We were betrayed!

[CANETTO *wounds him.*

Ah!

[*He manages to clinch with* CANETTO.

DAMIANO

[*He bounds up the stair which is blocked by the struggle.*]

We are betrayed. . .
Now, Fiamma, now. . .

FIAMMA

Damiano. . .

A SOLDIER

Damiano's men are beaten!

FIAMMA

Ah, leap into the sea!

DAMIANO

And leave you?

FIAMMA

I shall leap after!

DAMIANO

Throw me the child, then.
The boats are there.

[*He springs through the window, his sword still in his hand.*]

FIAMMA

[*A great cry.*

Ah! . . .

[CANETTO *strikes down the soldier who aided* DAMIANO *and leaps up the stair.*]

FIAMMA

Now, to my aid, oh, God!

[*She lifts* FIORENZO *to the ledge of the window but* CANETTO *is too quick for her.*]

CANETTO

[*Holding* FIORENZO.

Not he, Madonna. . .

UGOLINO

Does he swim, Canetto?

CANETTO

[*At the window.*

He churns the water with his arms. . .
The water shines about him. . .

DAMIANO

[*A voice of agony from the sea.*

Fiamma, oh, Fiamma. . .

FIAMMA

Ah! . . We were betrayed! We were betrayed!

[*An intense silence.*

CANETTO

Give me a crossbow. . .
Give me a crossbow, one of you. . .

FIAMMA

Oh, no. . .

[*The crossbow is handed to him.*

UGOLINO

Silence. . . Canetto shoots. . .

CANETTO

How white his face is even in the foam. . .

[*He has aimed and shoots quickly.*

I have killed Damiano.

UGOLINO

God sped the shaft. . .

CANETTO

A boat for him. . . a boat. . .

UGOLINO

No, let him sink. . .

CANETTO

This dripping carrion shall be
Madonna's wedding gift.

UGOLINO

Oh, yes!

CANETTO

A boat. . . a bow. . . a barcarolle. . .
After him, all of you. . .
Leave us alone.

[*The others follow.*

FIAMMA

Murderer. . . murderer. . .

CANETTO

You who thought to outwit Canetto's wits. . .
One thing you did not know, Madonna Fiamma,
How every passage of this castle hid
Its master's soldiers crowded in together
Like arrows in the quiver. . .
The soldiers of the Emperor, secretly
Brought here this night by me.
Even the Captain
He did not know.
Your ambuscade came to a sorry end.
Madonna Fiamma. . .

[*He goes quickly and without a sound.*

[FIAMMA *catches her breath in short, dry sobs. She comes unsteadily down the stair. She goes to the door and stands listening.* FIORENZO *watches her fearfully.*]

[*A great shout from the sea.*

CANETTO

[*Calls out behind and below.*

Madonna Fiamma. . . Madonna Fiamma. . .
Here's for your arsenal!

[*A sword is flung in the door and falls clattering on the stage.*]

FIAMMA

[*Falls upon it, crying out in terrible agony.*

Damiano!
Damiano!

FIORENZO

I am frightened, Mother. . .
Mother, what is that sword?
Mother. . .

FIAMMA

[*Struggles to her knees and prays frantically. She presses the cross-hilted sword against her heart. The words of her prayer are a broken and inaudible murmur.*]

Amen. . .Amen. . .

[*Prayer continues.*

[UGOLINO *drops upon his chair and watches stupidly.*]

[CANETTO *enters.*

FIAMMA

Amen . . . Amen . . .

CANETTO

Do not forget me in your prayers, Madonna,
There is no single soul in all the world
Has such a need as mine of intercession.

[*Something in him comes to life. With a very simple sincerity he adds:*]

I am a jongleur, who has learned too late,
God meant him for a man.

[*He comes over to her.*

I did not kill Damiano.

FIAMMA

Ah!

[*She rises to her feet and faces him.*

CANETTO

His Moorish mail was strong. . .
Your prayers were strong, Madonna.

FIAMMA

Oh, blessed Virgin!

CANETTO

Pray and pray!
It may be that you saved him!
The brave discharge of your conspiracy
Failed signally only because you did not know Canetto.

FIAMMA

Amen, I say.

CANETTO

So easily!

FIAMMA

We come and go and laugh
A little and endure our tears
As bravely as we may. . . Amen is all.
Do with us as you will. My son and I
Have no more resource left.

[*The sound of shuffling feet in the passage off stage L., the sound of men carrying a heavy burden.*]

CANETTO

Well, we shall see. Here is your husband, Fiamma,
My captive for the moments that are left
Upon his dial of life.

[*As he speaks, four soldiers enter carrying between them the dripping form of* DAMIANO *lashed upon a rough bench. He is not quite unconscious.*]

He blows salt water bubbles when he breathes.
How comical a tragedy!

[FIAMMA *bends silently over him.*

Fiamma, I pity you, you did not know
What power opposed you.
He is not sorely wounded.
He will revive.

FIAMMA

And afterwards?

CANETTO

Who knows?

FIAMMA

He will be killed?

CANETTO

What else?

FIAMMA

And by what means?

CANETTO

[*Smiles.*

Here's deep revenge exacted and between
This present and the aftermath of death
Exaction must be perfect.
We shall determine on the means,
My master and myself.
Ah, and you, too!

FIAMMA

Little Fiorenzo,
This is the hour your manhood comes to you.
Stand where your father's eyes may see you first,
When they have cleared. His look
Will be your accolade for life.
Damiano, speak to me. . .

DAMIANO

Fiamma! Is it death?

FIAMMA

There is no death. . .
And there is no defeat. . .
We are too strong.

DAMIANO

We were betrayed.
I shall die. . .

FIAMMA

Give me your hand.

DAMIANO

My love. . .

FIAMMA

We two have loved. That is the link between
God and ourselves. You see,
Damiano, what an empty thing is death.
Only our houses that we leave behind
Are dead. . .
There but the wind speaks in the empty rooms,
There but the wind walks on the empty stairs,
Emptiness there. But we! How splendidly
We two stand in the light,
Together!

DAMIANO

I have fought always. I could wish
That I had died in this immediately. . .

FIAMMA

A song, a laugh, a sob. . . and darkness after. . .
And then the sun again forevermore.

DAMIANO

I, in the fullest blooming of my summer,
Must gravely laugh and go to the supreme,
Making no question and no argument.
What will become of you?

FIAMMA

You shall not go
Alone away from here.

FIORENZO

Mother, you will not leave me here?

FIAMMA

Oh, no,
Fiorenzo!

DAMIANO

What of Fiorenzo?

FIAMMA

What of my heart is his will stay with him
Holding my body to protect his growth,
What of my heart is yours will go with you,
Taking my soul to bear you company.

DAMIANO

I am content.

[*He falls back.*

CANETTO

Bring in the other.

[*He speaks to a soldier who appears in the doorway. Two more soldiers appear.*]

These corpses. . .

[*He indicates the dead bodies which still lie on the stage.*]

Our little supper is not eaten yet. . .

[*To a soldier who is not carrying out the dead.*

Set this to rights.

[*The soldier proceeds to restore the table, etc.*

The wine is not yet drunk that we would drink.
Master, you must choose now.
Shall it be vengeance, now?
Or love?
For the occasion offers either,
Developed to a nicety so subtle
It were a pity to confuse the two.

UGOLINO

What is the end?

CANETTO

The end is death,
The sedative of human misery.

UGOLINO

Get quickly there.

CANETTO

In time—in time, good master. . .
Once you have made your choice
Between your vengeance and your love.

UGOLINO

I will not choose.

CANETTO

You must choose one.
You must give one or the other.

[*A look of fury from* UGOLINO.

I have served you well tonight.

UGOLINO

Give me the woman, then.

CANETTO

[*A long, bitter look at her.*
Beside my master, Fiamma!

UGOLINO

[*A cry of almost boyish despair.*
Fiamma! My Fiamma that I hate and love
So wretchedly to my defeat, relent!

CANETTO

So!
Tonight's an orgy, now.
I'll suck the occasion dry of what it holds. . .
I have not yet begun. . .
Here is the man she loves, here is the child.
Since I have lost her love for me, I wreck
My will upon her love for them and find
Such satisfaction as I may.
[*He throws himself upon the stool whereon he sat before.*]
Where is my page?
[*Sees* FIORENZO
Come fill
My master's glass and mine. . .
Before your father's spirit joins the stars
I'll have him see you in future state
Of serving me. The glass, I say, the glass. . .

FIAMMA

Oh, no. . .

DAMIANO

Do with me as you will. Spare him.

CANETTO

Pour wine.
Pour wine. . .

FIAMMA

Oh, no. . .

[FIORENZO *obeys.*

CANETTO

You see how well he learns?
The child is hungry.

[*He tosses a scrap of meat to* FIORENZO.

Here's for your appetite!

FIAMMA

[*Snatching* FIORENZO *to her.*

No!

CANETTO

He is my page. . . who might have been a prince.

DAMIANO

Knave. . . knave. . . knave. . .

[*Struggles to break free. The guards hold him.*

FIAMMA

God reckons with you! Ugolino,
You will not tolerate this horrid business?

UGOLINO

This sickens me, Canetto.

[*A soldier enters leading the* CAPTAIN. *His hands are bound, his head is bloody.*]

CANETTO

Captain, you come in time. Your treachery
Will presently be rewarded,
But, for the moment, we resume our feast,
Your seat awaits you.

CAPTAIN

Madonna, I regret
Nothing that I have done,

Nothing that I may suffer. . .
God be with you.

[FIAMMA *bows her head.*

[*Now, except that the table is not lighted as before with candles, the composition of the picture is the same.*]

[*The upper reaches of the tower are dark with the lustreless quality which precedes the dawn. Gradually a faint gray appears in the sky and the upper walls emerge.*]

CAPTAIN

Here are we four again and as we were
At Fiamma's feast of life
That was illuminate with hope,
That pulsed with sorrow. . .
Here are we four again,
With fruits and breads and meats and wines
No more transfigured into living things.
The light of hope is gone from us. . .
Ashes, forevermore.

CANETTO

Captain,
Are you prepared to die?

CAPTAIN

Better than you.

CANETTO

No doubt and far more like.

FIAMMA

Oh, God, I cry to you for justice!

CANETTO

Cry!!!
There is no reason here. . . .
Only that I will glut

My senses 'till, for weariness,
They shrink from satiation.
Why take the woman, Master, since for me
Love is not possible,
Give me your vengeance, rather; let me teach
You what delight there is in cruelty.
Certainly I shall put Damiano
To some insidious torture,
Then I shall sleep.
I'm tired!

CAPTAIN

Canetto . . . oh, Canetto. . . .

CANETTO

[*The terrible jester is his element.*
Were I a-straddle of the pit of hell
I should go on with this and drain my life
Tonight of its sensation. I am goaded,
Goad . . . spur and whip . . . a-gallop to the end!
[*A soldier enters in haste*
What is this interruption?

THE SOLDIER

Ser Canetto,
Another messenger is come from Rome. . . .

CANETTO

Rome!
Why do the crows flock here? This is the second.

THE SOLDIER

Messire Canetto, here's another matter.

CANETTO

They have their answer. . . .

THE SOLDIER

No. . . .

CANETTO

Say what you fear,
You quavering fool!

THE SOLDIER

The mainland is in arms,
The boats are out.

CANETTO

Fishers and farmers!

THE SOLDIER

The Pope has spoken.

CANETTO

Idiot! What of that?

THE SOLDIER

A price upon your head and Ugolino
Is excommunicated. . . .

CANETTO

[*With a great shout of laughter.*
Master, the church has barred you from its shelter!
Up Master, up! What's this? Asleep? Oh, no!
And in your cups beneath
This terrible arraignment?
How great the power of anathema,
That all the blighting curses of the church
Cannot arouse one drunkard's sleep!
Curse God and man and live forever more!
[*To the soldier.*
Go, man the gates again.
Hold off the boats.
Call Jacopone here to me . . . oh . . .
Fashion me crosses, I will have three crosses,
And set them on the battlements. The sun

Shall find six fish eyes staring out to sea
To greet his rising.
Three carcasses, stiff in the morning wind.
These traitors are the thieves, this child the savior
Upon my Calvary. And, at their feet
This weeping Magdalen who led Crusades.
Get hence about my orders.
Where's Jacopone?
Life will have life, lust, lust and death
Cries out for company.
Oh, world, world, world!
I love thee more than heaven.

[*The soldier has gone. Only one remains.* JACOPONE *enters.*]

Good Jacopone, it must be the rack. . . .
Our time is short. . . . Take torches and go down. . . .
Carry Damiano after. . . .

FIAMMA

Mercy . . . mercy. . . .

CANETTO

Will God be merciful to me? I fill
This moment to the brim. Let be what may. . . .

[*He strikes her out of his way.*

DAMIANO

God keep you, Fiamma. . . .

FIAMMA

Not alone. . . I come. . .
Along with you.

[*The trap has been opened and* JACOPONE *goes down. He illuminates torches below. The smoky red light shines up.*]

DAMIANO

[*As* FIAMMA *clings to him.*

Farewell.

CANETTO

Down, take him down . . .

[*The soldiers take* DAMIANO *down into the pit.*

FIAMMA

Have you no mercy?

CANETTO

None . . .

FIAMMA

No price?

CANETTO

No price that you will pay.

FIAMMA

Oh, God!

[CANETTO *is beside himself. He rushes to the edge of the pit.*]

Murderer . . . murderer . . . murderer! . . .

CANETTO

This is the festival of Lucifer!

FIAMMA

Oh, now . . . and in God's name, Canetto!

CANETTO

Lucifer! . . . Lucifer.

[*A soldier appears in the window.*

THE SOLDIER

Messire Canetto. . . .

CANETTO

Harder. . . .

I cannot hear him scream. . . .

THE SOLDIER

[*Shouting.*

Messire Canetto!

CANETTO

[*Pausing, exhausted.*

. . . What?

THE SOLDIER

Three galleys in the east. . .
Three galleys loom against the sky. . .
They come upon us.

CANETTO

The Pope in arms . . . how soon?

THE SOLDIER

An hour.

CANETTO

An hour. . .
That's a year to me. . .
Harder. I cannot hear him scream. . .
Go up and watch . . .

[*The soldier disappears.*

[FIAMMA *has snatched a knife from the table and leaps toward the trap where* CANETTO *stands.*]

CANETTO

[*Catching her.*

Oh, no . . .

FIAMMA

Great God . . .

CANETTO

[*Shouting down into the pit.*

Damiano, she would have killed you . . .
Mercifully. . . .

DAMIANO

Fiamma . . .

[FIORENZO, *who has cowered terrified in the corner, suddenly flings himself kicking and screaming at* CANETTO.]

CANETTO

[*Frees* FIAMMA *and seizes* FIORENZO *with a shout of triumph.*]

Here is the proper end. . . . Let be the father. . . .

[*From the pit the shouts of* DAMIANO *and* JACOPONE'S *voice. The sound of a blow and* DAMIANO'S *groan. A fall.* CANETTO *goes partly down.*]

CANETTO

Damiano . . . have you killed him?

JACOPONE

No, he's only stunned. . . . He'll come around. . . .

CANETTO

So . . . then . . .
Put on the child.

[FIAMMA *has stood very near* CANETTO. *Now she reaches toward him and grips his arm.*]

[*He turns toward her and looks into her face. There is no mistaking what she means. He looks at her a breathless moment. An inaudible exclamation escapes his lips.*]

[*Liberated by* CANETTO, FIORENZO *runs to the* CAPTAIN.]

[*Horrified, the* CAPTAIN *rises from his seat. His arms envelop* FIORENZO *and press the child's face against his body.*]

[CANETTO *staggers back, shuddering.*]

CANETTO

[*Dizzily he brushes his hand across his mouth and*

eyes and then comes to himself. He goes to UGOLINO.]

Asleep?

CAPTAIN

Madonna Fiamma,
No good is in this bargain.

CANETTO

Silence, old loon. . .
Madonna Fiamma,
Upon what terms, precisely?

FIAMMA

Those two go free, out of this place, with all
Immediate haste. To safety.

CANETTO

And yourself?
What will you do?

FIAMMA

What you may ask of me
Until I weary you.

CANETTO

Have you gone mad?

FIAMMA

Oh, no. I pay your price.

CANETTO

You sober me.
I do not buy.

FIAMMA

You must.
My husband and my child. . . . I give the rest
Of me to you in payment.

CANETTO

[*Moved, probably for the first time in his life.*

What are you thinking, Fiamma?
I am a dog, a kennel is my lodging. . . .

FIAMMA

My bargain stands unaltered.
I am prepared to share your kennel with you,
To sleep beside you in your mire, to eat
Foul flesh with you.

CANETTO

No, Fiamma.

FIAMM

An hour, a night, a lifetime,
If they go free. . . .
I know you have no mercy.

CAPTAIN

God!

FIAMMA

I do not think God will condemn this act,
But in some mystic way
Find it acceptable.

CANETTO

You do this proudly.

FIAMMA

I am not ashamed.

CANETTO

In all my life I have not seen such courage.
If I should die in this it were well worth
So small a sacrifice.
I own to the temptation, but I resist.
For all I said, my habits are too strong.
I will not be a traitor to my lord. . .
And, lest you tempt me further,
[He calls down into the pit.
Jacopone,
Finish him.

FIAMMA

I think you love me.

CANETTO

[*Holding his hand out to* JACOPONE *in the pit.*

Oh, woman!

FIAMMA

I think you love me.

CANETTO

Heaven and hell are very near akin,
In you.

FIAMMA

Canetto.

CANETTO

Oh, well.

[*He looks at the sleeping* UGOLINO.

I am as he at last. . . .
How will you do it?

FIAMMA

As you please, once they are safe away.

CANETTO

[*Calling down.*

Up, Jacopone.

[CANETTO *and* FIAMMA *stare at one another, the pit between them.* JACOPONE *comes up.*]

You, Captain, lend a hand. . . . Unloose his bonds.

[JACOPONE *slips the cords from the* CAPTAIN'S *wrists.*

Bring up the man.

[*The* CAPTAIN *and* JACOPONE *go down.*

Madonna, you are strangely calm.
If I were one to doubt you,
I'd think that you might take your life.

[FIAMMA *shakes her head.*

Fiamma, I envy you. You *are* strong.

[*The* CAPTAIN *and* JACOPONE *return carrying* DAMIANO.]

FIAMMA

He is not dead?

CAPTAIN

Not dead, but only stunned.

FIAMMA

Much better so. He would believe me traitor.
Now lay him gently down.

[DAMIANO *is placed on the bench.*

FIORENZO

Oh, Mother . . .

FIAMMA

Hush. . .
You must do as I tell you, now, Fiorenzo,
And not be frightened . . .
You must protect your father . . . Go with him
And when you come . . . to the good hermit's cell,
Say to the hermit I entrusted you
To him, Fiorenzo, and remember me
Always.

[*She kisses him.*

[*The* CAPTAIN *makes to lift* DAMIANO. *She stops him. She turns to* CANETTO.]

You will entrust them to the Captain?

CANETTO

No.

FIAMMA

It must be as I say.

CANETTO

[*Looks at her a moment, then shrugs his shoulders.*

Captain, you will go free upon this errand.
There's greater enterprise than punishment
Afoot. I am the greater traitor.

I atone the lesser's sin.
Convoy this load of carrion
Over the water.

FIAMMA

Captain, you know I trust you.

CAPTAIN

I know this is not lightly done.

FIAMMA

Stay on with them.

CAPTAIN

Forever, if you bid me.

FIAMMA

And tell them how this was.

CANETTO

Go.

FIAMMA

[*She stops the* CAPTAIN *again.*
I will not speak with them, but only look,
And swiftly pass.

[*She looks on* DAMIANO *and on* FIORENZO. *Then she nods to the* CAPTAIN. DAMIANO *is carried out by the* CAPTAIN, JACOPONE *and another soldier.* FIORENZO *walks sturdily after them.*]

A breath of childhood came against my breast. . . .
A kiss of childhood brushed across my lips. . . .
My breast is dry again, my lips are dry. . . .
The memory will vanish.

[CANETTO *draws the emerald necklace forth and throws it over her head, holding it like a leash.*]

FIAMMA

Canetto, grant my eyes
A last unstained farewell.

CANETTO

Go up . . . go up. . . .

FIAMMA

[*She turns toward the stair.*

Before me there was nothing. After me
All things go on.

[*She ascends to the window.*

The stars are gone.
I think
That God was looking down upon this place
And would not show his face to us, and, so,
Extinguished them.

CANETTO

[*Awed.*

Who are you?

FIAMMA

I am the blinded horse
Discarded from the wars.
I turn the heavy millstone of despair
Round, round and round.

CANETTO

[*He is almost shaken.*

Afterwards,
What will become of you?
I have an hour only.
What will become of you afterwards?

FIAMMA

I shall go up to heaven joyfully
To guard these fortunate memories of mine
Lest future circumstance bewilder them.
As a white, soaring sea bird I shall go
Into the singing, white eternities.

[*Evidently the boat bearing its precious, tragic cargo has come into her sight. She leans far out of the window.*]

Oh, you, Fiorenzo and Damiano, now farewell!

[*She has looked her fill. She comes brokenly down the steps to the centre and begins to climb the other side. Suddenly she stiffens and turns to* CANETTO, *looking upon him as with an unearthly sense of power.*]

CANETTO

If I should die in this!

[*He moves to follow her, but her glance halts him. She continues toward the shrine and makes the sign of the cross before it. She does not pray. When she turns toward him again, there is a smile of triumph on her face. Her voice rings out strongly.*]

FIAMMA

Come when you will.

[*She goes into her room.*

CANETTO

Ah!

[*He starts. He glances at* UGOLINO. *He laughs nervously. He hears the singing of the fishermen on the sea. He looks toward them. He listens to his master's steady breathing. He shrugs his shoulders. He goes quickly to the stairs and mounts them. He stands a hesitant moment at the door of* FIAMMA'S *room. He starts to come down. He returns and goes in.*]

[*From the sea comes the sound of a sailor's chantey.*

CHANTEY

Strong is the heart of the Virgin, soft are her eyes!

CHORUS

Ohe . . . ohe. . . .

CHANTEY

Gentle is she and lovely, kindly and wise!

CHORUS

Ohe . . . ohe. . . .

CHANTEY

Her dais of amber and silver shines in the skies!

CHORUS

Ohe . . . ohe. . . .

[*The chantey intoned rhythmically, the chorus shouted.*]

CHANTEY

Man that is born of woman lives unashamed!

CHORUS

Ohe . . . ohe. . . .

CHANTEY

Weakling is he and sinful, brute and untamed!

CHORUS

Ohe . . . ohe. . . .

CHANTEY

But his soul is the soul of Mary the Virgin acclaimed!

[JACOPONE *enters during the chantey. He looks at* UGOLINO *who stirs uneasily. The castle is stirring again. A distant trumpet call, and a roll of drums. The clank of a chain as, perhaps, the portcullis is raised.*]

[*A soldier comes in.*

THE SOLDIER

Hi, Jacopone!

JACOPONE

Shhh——

THE SOLDIER

Relief. . . .
Past time, you dolt. The fishers are abroad.

JACOPONE

I hear them.

THE SOLDIER

[*Sees* UGOLINO.

Eh, what? Again?
She's a cold mistress. Does he always sleep
Out here?

JACOPONE

Silence, you swine.

THE SOLDIER

He's drunk. God, man,
But you look sick. . . .

JACOPONE

And so would you. . . .
The things that I have seen this night and heard!

[*He goes out. A ray of the rising sun strikes the tower and comes down from above direct upon* UGOLINO *who stirs again. The soldier watches him for a few seconds. Then he sees the open trap, goes to it, looks down, closes it with a crash.*]

UGOLINO

Canetto! Canetto!

THE SOLDIER

Not here, my lord.

UGOLINO

[*Befuddled still by wine.*

Where is he?

THE SOLDIER

Couldn't say.
I've been on guard all night.
The galleys still hold off.

UGOLINO

It's morning.

THE SOLDIER

Day.
There's matins ringing.

[*The bells are audible once more.*

UGOLINO

Then I've been sleeping. Is there wine there?

[*He rises clumsily, not yet fully awake. The soldier pours him wine and goes. He drinks it, looks about him, remembers. Sees the closed trap and mutters, scratching his head.*]

Ah, Fiamma. . . .
Canetto, where are you?
Canetto!

[*A terrible suspicion crosses his mind. At this very moment* MADDELENA, GIOVANNA *and* AMINA *enter with their brooms and pails as though to clean the room. They stop at the door.*]

MADDELENA

Look at the master!

AMINA

He has slept here again on the rushes.

UGOLINO

[*With a bellow of rage he catches up his sword where he had dropped it upon the table early in the act.*]

Harlot, he's in your chamber!
You've got him in your chamber.

[*He lurches toward the stairs and up them toward the door of* FIAMMA'S *room.*]

[*Off stage the sound of a faint babble of voices, very joyous and excited. As at the end of the first act, the burghers and women come from the village. The men are unarmed. The women*

carry palm leaves. They come quickly past the three servants and pause. They see UGOLINO.]

GIOVANNA

[*Crying out in terror.*

Oh, God, he'll murder her!

UGOLINO

Harlot!

[*He has reached the top of the stair and he pulls open the door of* FIAMMA'S *chamber. The full glory of the rising sun bursts upon him. He staggers back.*]

[CANETTO'S *body has been huddled against the door on the inside. It falls out at his feet. A great wound in his throat shows us that he is dead.*]

UGOLINO

[*His sword falls from his hand onto the stage. He clutches the body and drags it down the stairs, gasping.*]

Canetto. . . .
Dead, but still warm. . . .
Dead, but still warm. . . .
There's blood upon him. . . .
What did he there?
Canetto, oh my brother, my Canetto!

[*The refrain of the chantey is fainter, but the matins bells have swelled jubilantly out. They seem to blend together in a hymn of triumph. So* FIAMMA *enters, as one who walks gloriously from light into music. Her hands reach out before her. Her face is upturned to the heavens. The look in her eyes and the smile of her lips is somehow celestial. She comes quite steadily down the stair and goes toward the door. She is conscious of nothing but her supreme victory, her sublime joy.*]

A WOMAN

[*As* FIAMMA *appears.*

Madonna Fiamma!

A BURGHER

You are saved, Madonna!

A SOLDIER

Madonna, you shall go free!

[*He speaks as he bursts through the door.*

[*The* NUNCIO *enters with other soldiers. He pauses at the sight of* FIAMMA.]

A BURGHER

She has killed Canetto.

THE NUNCIO

Not she, but God . . .
She was God's instrument.

[UGOLINO *makes one motion toward the divine woman and shrinks back aghast against the wall. As she passes him, his eyes follow her.*]

A WOMAN

Madonna, you are saved!
Oh, Madonna!

[*The last words in complete awe. She sinks to her knees. All the others kneel.*]

[*A radiance of light shines in through the door upon* FIAMMA. *The women kiss the hem of her dress.*

[*She is gone out through the door into the music. She will walk dry shod over the waters. A triumphant shout greets her.*]

FIAMMA! MADONNA FIAMMA!

THE END

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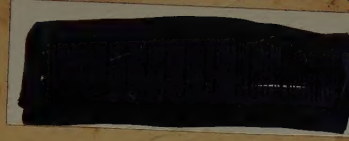
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